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## REVELATION AND THE BIBLE.

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# VERBUM DEI

THE

YALE LECTURES ON PREACHING, 1893

BY

✓  
ROBERT F. HORTON, M.A.

*(Sometime Fellow of New Coll., Oxford)*

AUTHOR OF "REVELATION AND THE BIBLE," ETC.

Eine Religion welche sich noch entwickelt hat Propheten,  
eine vollendete nur Schriftgelehrte

HERMANN SCHULTZ

New York

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND LONDON

1893

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Norwood Press :  
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith,  
Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

# Dedication

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TO MY BELOVED FRIEND

R. O.

WHO THROUGH MANY CHANGEFUL YEARS HAS

BY GOD'S GRACE

KEPT HIGH AND CLEAR BEFORE ME THE IDEAL OF THE

PREACHER'S CALLING

I, WITH REVERENCE EQUAL TO AFFECTION

INSCRIBE THIS

BOOK



## PREFACE



WHEN the invitation came to me to cross the Atlantic and deliver the *Lyman Beecher* Lecture on Preaching, I at once accepted it, because, conscious as I was of my unworthiness to stand in the honourable succession of the Yale Lecturers, I felt that there is a mode of conceiving the Christian Ministry which is not sufficiently recognised even by preachers themselves. The general contempt into which preaching has fallen on this side of the Atlantic, where the Established Church promises before long to thrust the sermon into a corner, or even outside the precincts, of its sacerdotal shrines, and where the other Churches are strongly tempted to secularise the pulpit, is, it seems to me, due to the decay of that conception of preaching which is presented in these lectures. This must be the excuse for adding

another book to the ever-widening tide of passing literature. The audience of the Yale Divinity School is important, but the author would cherish the hope of speaking to preachers who are already engaged in their life-work, and of quickening in some of them the sense of their Divine commission. He would pray that this little volume may come to his brothers in the ministry with a genuine message from God.

ROBERT F. HORTON.

HAMPSTEAD, February, 1893.



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SOUL, rule thyself. On passion, deed, desire,  
Lay thou the laws of thy deliberate will.  
Stand at thy chosen post, faith's sentinel :  
Though Hell's lost legions ring thee round with fire.  
Learn to endure. Dark vigil hours shall tire  
Thy wakeful eyes ; regrets thy bosom thrill ;  
Slow years thy loveless flower of youth shall kill ;  
Yea, thou shalt yearn for lute and wanton lyre.  
Yet is thy guerdon great ; thine the reward  
Of those elect who, scorning Circe's lure,  
Grown early wise, make living light their lord.  
Clothed with celestial steel, these walk secure,  
Masters, not slaves. Over their heads the pure  
Heavens bow, and guardian seraphs wave God's sword.

J. A. SYMONDS.

## LECTURE I.



## LECTURE I.

### THE THEME.

THE theme which has to be handled in the present lectures is not without its grave responsibility. The lectures themselves should be not only an exposition of the argument, but an example of it. The lecturer is in the position of one who seeks to expound poetry by producing a poem. The aim is to show that preaching must be the deliverance of a word of God received immediately from God; and unless these lectures are such a word, received in such a way, they doubly miss their mark; they not only fail as lectures, but they discredit the high contention which they are intended to sustain.

Need I say that I, labouring under a sense of this responsibility, am "with you in weak-

ness, and in fear, and in much trembling"? If I did not believe that I had a message to deliver I should not be here, but I am conscious of the straitening until the mission is accomplished, and the message delivered; for it is one matter to see the heavens open, to be aware of an authentic voice, to catch the momentary gleams of things unspeakable; and it is another matter to speak distinctly or even credibly of the heavenly vision. Like the tumultuous recollections of a dream, a great truth seems to evade us when we try to state it, and what appeared to us as a revelation sounds in the telling like a truism.

The truth, however, to be illustrated in these lectures is admittedly a commonplace. The object is not to persuade you to grant that it is a truth; that we all grant even too easily; but rather to consider how the conceded truth of theory may come into the venturous truth of practice. For preaching, like other important spheres of human activity, loses its power and declines, not for want of a right theory, nor yet from defect of shining examples, but

from a sapping at the springs. The springs need to be renewed and cleansed that the streams may flow afresh.

Let me take an illustration from a lower plane: In the sculpture gallery of the Capitol at Rome there is a collection of busts complete, or nearly complete, of all the Roman Emperors from the earliest to the latest. The busts are for the most part the work of contemporary artists. It is a fine study to trace the decay of the Art from the noble Greek marbles of the early Cæsars, through the gracious decline in the silver age of the Antonines, to the relapse into barbarism in the days of the Gothic Emperors. The singular reflection occurs, that the sculptor who chiselled this latest effigy, a work little better than the crude wooden doll of a child, a caricature of a human head, had before him, there in Rome, those consummate examples from the great period. The heir of all the Ages—he produced this! In the presence of masterpieces this was his handiwork. The explanation of such a decline and a degrada-

tion is found when we observe the conditions of true productiveness in Art. Lifeless imitation is decay. The copy of the best models passes by insensible gradations into the production of the worst. Art comes from life. Invention is as it were of the soil. A great period of Art occurs when men get back to Nature, and a few men of genius, generally men from the fresh-turned furrows and the bare ribs of the earth, lay hands, ungloved by convention, on the reality of things; they must be men possessed of great energy and will, for it is always difficult to keep pressing closely on the contour and form of fact. The miserable declension of Art, illustrated in that gallery of the Capitol, was due to the gradual drifting of its ministers from the sources of truth and inspiration into the servile adoption of routine.

And so in the matter of preaching the great models are always before us, and the lasting principles of it are known and admitted, but the secret of it may very easily be lost. It may become—it often has become—a dull



mechanic exercise, which seems to the wise childish and trivial, and the more childish and trivial because it affects with the pompous make-believe of childishness to be something so much greater, something even divine.

Let me, as an introduction to-day, state in the briefest form the theme that is to occupy us, and draw some of the lines on which the subsequent lectures will proceed.

Here is the theme: Every living preacher must receive his message in a communication direct from God, and the constant purpose of his life must be to receive it uncorrupted, and to deliver it without addition or subtraction.

It is a truism, but, I think you will all agree, a neglected truism. If in our brief better moments we see it, we constantly are tempted to recede from it. Not without some suspicion of what may be involved in unflinchingly accepting it as true, we are apt to take refuge in modifications, compromises, denials. Flesh shrinks, and the heart cries out. Let some one else go up the rugged steep of the mountain and see Him face to face. Let some

one else stand awestruck in the passing of the Almighty. I will do some humbler task. Let me read the lessons, or let me recite the creed, or let me be a priest, clad in the robes of office which are a discharge from personal fitness. On many grounds and in many ways we disclaim our calling. The truth remains as a truism, but we dare not grasp it ourselves. The world notices our disclaimer, and accepts us on the level of our own elected degradation.

It is a truism; but are we ready, in face of what is involved, to grant that it is true? The message must be received from God in a direct communication! The preacher is indeed a Prophet. The full meaning of this dawns upon us as we look at the alternatives. He is a Prophet; that is, he is not merely a Reciter or Rhetorician; he is not merely a Lecturer or Philosopher; he is not, above all he is not, merely a Priest.

I recollect hearing a famous reciter, who was also a clergyman. He could take any passage of literature, verse or prose, and by the exquisite modulation of voice, the supple

changes of feature, and the sympathetic apprehension of the author's subtlest thoughts and suggestions, he could play upon his audience with all the keyboard of books at his command, move us to laughter or tears, lead us tripping through the gay parterres of mirth, or bear us up the starry track to the heights beyond us. One supposed that surely he would be a great preacher. Indeed, what had he to do but to learn some noble utterances of Massillon or Bourdaloue, or to compose sermons of his own and deliver them in the manner of his recitals, in order to sweep us all upwards and Godwards as with a wind? But no, he was not a great preacher; he was a great reciter in the pulpit, that was all; and there were among his contemporaries men without any command of language or any gifts of the orator who would accomplish more in a simple address than he in all his eloquent discourses.

It may be well to say at once that the noble gift of oratory and the fine art of elocution may be pressed into the service of preaching,

but they have to be watched; they are saucy slaves who with their castanets and bangles will always be seeking to gain the upper hand, superseding their master and covering his absence with their noise and sparkle. A good voice is invaluable if God speaks through it. A commanding presence is a great help if God's presence commands it. The rich flow of language may be fertilising as well as charming if the tide of God is in it. But the preacher is not a Reciter or an Orator. His purpose, his power, his practice, are quite independent of these accomplishments.

Again, the Preacher is not a Lecturer or a Philosopher. There is the broad distinction between Hellas and Israel, the nation of culture and the people of revelation. In cultivated nations whose culture rests on the study of the Classics, it is not surprising that our teachers constantly show a tendency to imitate Hellenic or Latin models, to walk in the Porch or the Garden with the broad-browed thinkers of Athens, or to move in the stately periods of the *rostra* or the *curia* of

Rome. In this way many preachers have been misled, and, painful as it is to say so,

Divine Philosophy  
Has pushed beyond its mark to be  
Procureess of the lords of hell.

The Philosopher has a sphere of his own, but it is not the preacher's. He is committed to the search for Truth in devious ways. He is bound to pass through "sunless gulfs of doubt" if he is to touch the sunny shore. His conclusions are reached by the slow accumulations of the Ages, he is the spectator of all time and of all existence, and what he sees is precious to the world, but "the world by wisdom knows not God." Philosophy is not equal to the grand assay of understanding Him, still less is it authorised to speak as His mouthpiece.

The Lecturer has a sphere of his own, but it is not the preacher's. He can by study, by reading, by observation, and by using the arts of right reasoning, clear ordering, and pleasing enunciation, give the results of his labour

to those who will hear. His function is epitome. He is the retailer to busy men of the goods which lie in the great wharves and warehouses of knowledge. The lecturer may under inspiration become a preacher, but woe to the preacher if under some sinister influences he becomes merely a lecturer. He will not have staying power. An encyclopædia is exhausted in time, and long before it is exhausted the hearers are exhausted with receiving it. The world rightly declines to hear two lectures a week from the same man throughout the year. If he is a great man and a good lecturer it will be well content to hear a course or two from him in a lifetime, but even then it will acknowledge surfeit, and be sparing in utterance of grace.

Yet here, again, we admit at the beginning that philosophical powers may be used with advantage in preaching, if they are not allowed to "spoil" the preacher; and the talent of the lecturer is often of service in the vast and varied work of the pulpit. What I am saying is no slight passed on Thought; and as we pro-

ceed you will see that I do not advocate the neglect of those stores on which the lecturer draws. A tincture of Philosophy is even necessary for every preacher. It is impossible to move with dexterity in this complicated world without some intelligible scheme of things underlying our thought. A wrong philosophy is better than none at all. It is better to be through life a novice in thought than not to think. And in the same way the systematic dividing of truth to the people in the manner of a lecturer will produce a certain clearness and directness in the higher service. Let one, then, who would be a preacher, not shirk the travail of thought or the huckster's habit of displaying wares to advantage. These things are good if it is always remembered that preaching is something different, independent of them, though using them, and often more powerful unaided than with their aid.

Again, the Priest, I am charitable enough to suppose, has a sphere of his own, but it is not the preacher's. I say, I am charitable

enough to suppose, because I find it impossible to form a conception of what place sacerdotalism could have in Christianity as Christ conceived it; the notion that men can by virtue of their office mediate spiritual and moral blessings to others, when they themselves do not possess a spiritual or even a moral life, seems to cut at the root of that inward and vital religion the law of which was summed up by its Founder in the twofold command to love, and the ritual of which was explained by the same authority in the principle that God is Spirit, and they that worship must worship in spirit and in truth. But leaving aside this subject of contention, and even conceding that a human priesthood is needed in the Christian Church, the preacher's function is essentially different from the priest's. If the checkered history of the Church proves that now and again priests have been true preachers, it has been not by virtue of their priesthood, but by reason of their entering into a totally different region of the religious life; and broadly speaking, the orders of preachers



have risen up outside the ranks of the priests in sacerdotal Churches, while, as a rule, preaching in its noblest and richest sense has flourished and wrought its wonders only in those churches in which the priesthood has been abolished, or at least successfully repressed.<sup>1</sup>

We have to face the truism, the neglected truism, that every living preacher must receive a communication direct from God. This is in the last resort the only justification of preaching at all. The man is set apart to address his fellow-men, sometimes men who are his equals or his superiors in knowledge and ability, perhaps even in speaking power and copiousness of language. Why should they listen to him? There is no reason why

<sup>1</sup> "Durch das Prophetenthum ist Israel vor den Gefahren der Priesterherrschaft bewahrt. Und in den Zeiten der höchsten Entwicklung dieser Religion haben sich die Wege des priesterlichen Schriftgelehrten mit seiner Thorah und des Propheten mit seinem Gottesworte mehr und mehr von einander getrennt. Doch konnte in Israel wie bei andern Völkern Priesterthum und Prophetenthum in einer Person verbunden sein, und vielleicht hat es sogar wie bei den Griechen Familienzusammenhänge gegeben, in welchen prophetische Kraft sich besonders äusserte." (Hermann Schultz, *Offenbarungsreligion*, &c., p. 216.)

they should unless he has been in the secret cell of the Oracle and has heard God speak. And indeed practically they will not, unless the authentic note is in him, and *Thus saith the Lord* tacitly introduces all that he teaches. Has he never heard the voice? Is he not repeating a message? Then assuredly he will fail. No man taketh this honour to himself. To be God's mouthpiece when God is not speaking through him is a fraud of the palpable kind which men will not away with. Over many an unfaithful preacher we are obliged to say what Keble said of the disobedient man of God in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>—

Alas, my brother, round thy tomb  
In sorrow kneeling, and in fear  
We read the Pastor's doom  
Who speaks and will not hear.

All manner of sins may be forgiven a preacher—a harsh voice, a clumsy delivery, a bad pronunciation, an insufficient scholarship, a crude doctrine, an ignorance of men; but there is one

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xiii. 26.

defect which cannot be forgiven, for it is a kind of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; it cannot be forgiven him if he preaches when he has not received a message from God to deliver. Woe unto those prophets whom the Lord hath not sent!

That genuine prophet of our day, George Macdonald, has told a story of a clergyman who in the course of his ministry, by intercourse with a dwarfed but genuinely spiritual member of his flock, became aware that his preaching was unreal, the repetition of things which he had heard by rote, and in no sense the utterance of anything which he had received from God. He came to the courageous resolve to announce to his people that he intended to preach to them other men's sermons, in each case informing them of the author, until he had something to tell them from himself. For some months this avowed plagiarism went on — and at last the seal of the fountain within him was broken, and from a genuine knowledge of God he was able to testify what he had known and his hands had handled of the word

of life. That was a wise, and indeed an inevitable result of a true and honest soul recognising the reality of the case. There is no disgrace in frankly avowing that no word of the Lord has come to you; but there is shame and sorrow in preaching when the word has not come; it is a source of delusion to preacher and hearer alike.

There is a noble preacher in England to-day who has declared that the turning-point in his ministry came when he discovered the principle of which I am speaking. He noted carefully which discourses, or which parts of his discourses, were accountable for such success as attended his preaching. And presently he observed that only those things produced any effect which had passed through the alembic of his own experience, and had been, in effect, real transactions between himself and God. Thenceforward he began to base his preaching upon that foundation. And the tides of blessing which have followed his work in these latter years are an evidence that the change was right.

Things which are happening in the world around you, things which you have studied in books, all the material of preaching may be useful or useless. It is nothing in them themselves which determines the alternative. What settles the question is, whether or no the preacher has received these things from God to deliver in that form, on that occasion, and with that application.

I remember once hearing a very remarkable and poetic preacher declare that the preacher, like the poet, *nascitur non fit*. I think he was uttering a protest against the notion that any college, or school of the prophets, can produce a prophet by training or education. This good minister expressed the view which it is precisely the object of these lectures to combat. I do not wish to contest the point that colleges cannot produce true preachers. Perhaps no person, on reflection, ever thought that they could. But the gist of what I have to say to you will perhaps appear at once if I lay down the proposition, that the preacher is in no respect like the poet, for the congenital gifts are

in a manner an accident. *Non nascitur, non fit.* He is not born a preacher, nor is he made a preacher. But he is called of God, called to receive the message of God. If he receives it diligently and delivers it faithfully he deserves the name by which he is called; if he ceases to receive, or through some culpable neglect fails to deliver it, he is put from his office by God, even if he retains his titles, his congregation, and his emoluments. *Non nascitur, non fit, sed vocatur.*

It would be premature to make any attempt to state how and on what conditions this immediate communication is to be received by the genuine preacher, but it may be well to clear the ground for what is to be subsequently said, by first defining this kind of communication so as to distinguish it from other psychological facts with which it may be easily confused, and then pointing out some of the demands which must be made on every one who thoroughly understands what a task the preacher is called on to fulfil.

First, then, we must observe that the com-

munication which God gives to the preacher must be something over and above the intellectual conviction that certain articles of religion are true. We have all suffered many things from preachers. The sum of the world's sufferings in that line has yet to be made up. But the most insufferable pain has come from men who thoroughly accept the great truths of religion — of Christianity — and make no question about their obligation on the conscience and receptiveness of the hearer, and yet, never commending the truths to believers, or to unbelievers, are simply tiresome in their logical precision and irritating in their irresistible conclusiveness. To be firmly persuaded of religious truth is not in itself a call to preach. Every man should have this persuasion — every man should have his orthodoxy and hold by it. But every man is not required to offer his orthodoxy to others. The articles of his faith, whencesoever derived, are for him, and for him alone, until God adds this other article to the rest, "Go and tell My people." In days of doubt and uncertainty it may be so rare a thing

for a man to have a fixed belief, that the possession of it may seem to lay on the possessor the duty of exposition. But in the Christian consciousness this is not enough. Before utterance is obligatory, the word must be burning within like the seething lava-fountains in the heart of a volcano, and demanding outlet by a Divine compulsion. When God bids a man speak, it often chances that the man has few truths to utter, and those in a chaotic condition; not infrequently His *Nabi*, or Seer, is one with a poor range of thought, and many big lacunæ in his knowledge; such a man as no earthly sovereign would select as an ambassador, and no University would pass as a graduate, but the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him; he speaks the poor and halting word, but it goes like a "bolted breath," and is wedged in a gnarled heart that no erudition or eloquence could touch. God's word may come to a man in a creed as rigid as Calvin's, and work through an intellectual system held and taught as relentlessly as Calvinism was held and taught by Jonathan Edwards. But it may not. And



we must keenly discriminate between the acceptance and the conviction of such a creed on the one hand, and the preacher's direct communication on the other.

Nor, strange as it sounds at first, is even a personal experience of vital religion in the soul a sufficient warrant for preaching. God will often give a man bread, yes, and wine and oil, to strengthen and gladden his heart, and yet by no means require him to dispense to a multitude. The loaf will not bear pulling — or its tenuity becomes innutritious; and his cruse is empty long before the first round. Though a real preacher receives the word in his experience, and, like the one to whom I just referred, finds his message quick and powerful on that condition only, yet no delusion could be greater than that he has to preach his own experience — that alone, or even chiefly that. What soul is large enough to box the compass of the winds, and to travel all seas of the religious life?

If God never gives a man a message except the narrative of a limited round of personal

experiences, let him speak in a class-meeting, or pour out his soul to this one or another, but let him not attempt to preach. He is certainly not called.

Coleridge tells of a sculptor who produced very indifferent works, but one feature was always well moulded and executed. The secret at last oozed out—he had a wife with no other points of beauty, but that single feature. A preacher's work will be of the same untempered quality, the same wearisome admixture of many parts bad with one good, if he supposes that his personal experience, instead of the word he receives from God, is to be the substance of his message. He is an ambassador—he has to bring a matter from his sovereign. If he babbles only of his own passages with the King—the favours he has received at Court, the honour conferred on him by the present embassy, and the like—the first interest with which he was received will quickly die, and a conviction will spring up that even those personal favours must be a fiction, for how could the Great King so

honour one who has this incapacity to discharge his simple commission?

Still more important is it to avoid the confusion between a communication from God and the emotional or æsthetic excitement which is produced in many fine temperaments by religious themes. A poet or an artist in the pulpit need not be suspect — quite the contrary — but he will have to watch himself suspiciously, lest he fall into a very natural snare. A man with poetic sensibility, awake to the harmonies and the raptures of high narrative, is very apt to glow, to thrill, to melt, and to feel the moisture on his cheek, in handling the theme of religion, and especially in telling the story of the Christ. There is little wonder if he, and even his audience, mistakes this effusion of feeling for a true word of God. But the two are quite distinct. An utterance from the deep cell of immediate revelation is a different thing from the musical sound which issues out of the cave of Apollo. Poet, or no poet, the preacher must have heard God; the word once received may then

be delivered in pedestrian language, or in winged words, according to the manner of the individual speaker. It is the word of God, not the sweetness of the numbers, that is important.

In the same way many natures are curiously susceptible to the picturesque. Colours move them. Fretted roofs and long-drawn aisles, the noise that high-built organs make, and the prophets blazoned on the panes, affect them with sentiments which seem to be religious. Preachers subject to these influences may maintain a stream of very pretty eloquence, and the ears of the people may be soothed and charmed as with a very subtle music, and all this may be mistaken for the word of God. Perhaps it is a good and safe rule that unless a message can touch men in unadorned simplicity, it is better unadorned, so that its nakedness may appear. Unless a sermon can be effective in a hayloft or by the wayside it will be useless in a cathedral. Is the word of God in it authentic and immediate and real? That is the vital question. If the word of God is

not in it, the æsthetic excitement will be only a delusion, and the preacher may be himself deluded as he is deluding others.

Further distinctions and delimitations may be spared at this stage. Here is the one thing needful. The preacher is called upon to go direct to God, to receive God's word into his heart, and to utter it, it alone, with all the power that is in him. If the word is not God's, if it is not received from Him, received in that shape and for that occasion, he were better silent; his message will fall to the ground; and he, unfaithful one, will have a weary circle in the purging fires to tread, that he may repent and learn wisdom.

But if this is so, who can adequately describe the preacher's responsibility? Or how can we sufficiently emphasise the essential conditions of rightly discharging the high office?

He must get a word from God before he speaks it—that is the requirement. Even at this point it is possible to see what that will demand from him in the bent of his mind and in the initial set of his life. Clearly he has a

task which will need an undivided attention and a complete absorption in its fulfilment. He is to climb Sinai with its ring-fence of death, and on the summit speak face to face with Him whom no one can see and yet live. He is to push through the wilderness, eating angels' meat or nothing, and scale the crags of Horeb, where in a great hollow, shadowed by a hand, he may through earthquake, wind, and fire, discern the still small voice. What a venture it is for him ! No sphere of human activity is to be compared with the exigencies of this endeavour. Men who are set on making money give their whole being to it, their time is freely sacrificed; for the one dear end they do not hesitate to barter the sweets of life, and the beauty of the earth,

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.

Not only do they surrender the charms of ease and spiritual development here, but they very readily forego the life to come, give their souls to the god of this world, and tread with restless eagerness the *descensus Averni*. And all this, that they may make money !

The preacher must cast the die with a similar absoluteness. For the descent to Avernus is easy compared with the ascent to the mount of God and the entrance to the place of the Oracle.

Or again, notice how a painter achieves excellence. The world is parcelled out into pictures for him. He sees the moving panorama as the landscape is framed in the window of the flying express. He catches every gleam of the changing daylight, and every effect of the falling shadows. Every combination of colours, every grouping of outlines, every incident of the show, is entered as a note in the sketch-book of his mind. He can only be a painter on these terms: that he will sit at the gateway of Nature, and never miss a glimpse when the door is, for moments too brief, rolled back on its hinges. He must be a mirror of the great pageant by day and night, and must order and compose the fleeting reflexions.

So has the preacher to wait at the portal of God, and to receive into himself the solemn utterance from the Holy Place. He has time for no inattention; he can admit of no distrac-

tions. There is much to hear, and he can spare no syllable.

Though he is in the world and moving with the life of men, full of sympathies and interests, full of the world's thought and its passion, he is necessarily detached from the world, not admitting its principles, nor dazzled by its attractions, nor flattered by its favours. When it praises or blames, his ear is preoccupied with the voice of God. Its jargon, its claims, its philosophy, its science, the cry of its markets, and the tumult of its havens, the giddy rush of its pleasures, and the acclamation of its ambitions, come to him, not as unreal, — they are in a sense too real, — but dwarfed into a certain insignificance of transitoriness by the presence of a truer reality and the authoritative sound of a more commanding speech which issues from the mouth of God.

He cannot allow the motive of avarice or social advancement, the spur of human admiration, or the promise of success, to move him from his place at that high portal. And the World may well look with a kind of scornful



pity on this outsider who is speaking to it, so disillusioned in the contemplation of its delights, and so insistent on that faint-sounding word of God which to him is the only voice worth hearing, and to it is the only voice which is inaudible or at least incredible.

But he does not need pity, he has his compensations, for —

He that of such a height has built his mind,  
And reared the dwelling of his thoughts so strong,  
As neither fear nor hope can shake the frame  
Of his resolved powers ; nor all the wind  
Of vanity or malice pierce to wrong  
His settled peace, or to disturb the same :  
What a fair seat hath he, from whence he may  
The boundless wastes and wealds of man survey !

And with how free an eye doth he look down  
Upon these lower regions of turmoil !  
Where all the storms of passion mainly beat  
On flesh and blood : where honour, power, renown,  
Are only gay afflictions, golden toil ;  
Where greatness stands upon as feeble feet  
As frailty doth, and only great doth seem  
To little minds who do it so esteem.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daniel's *Epistle to the Countess of Cumberland*.

the first 20 pages of the book. I have read  
the first 20 pages of the book, & the writing  
of the book is the best of the kind I have  
read; but it is not, as I have said, the  
best of the kind of the kind, for about  
the first 20 pages of the book.

## LECTURE II.



## LECTURE II.

“THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME.”

*Illustrations from the Old Testament.*

THE present lecture is in one way the easiest of the series, for we are all tolerably well agreed that the word of the Lord came in a very distinct and intelligible manner to “holy men of old.” The difficulty in the Church has seldom been to believe that the word *came*, but always to believe that it *comes*. Most of us are believers in a revelation that was; few in a revelation that is.

It may be that we have only the faintest conception of what is meant by this familiar phrase, “The word of the Lord came;” it may be that we have shut it up among the other curiosities of that venerable museum which is filled with Biblical Ideas, duly marked, “Visitors are requested not to touch;”

it may be that we never expect, we should deem it an irreverence to expect, that any similar experience should happen to-day; but yet we are tacitly agreed that "God did of old time speak unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners," and, what is more, we believe that in the last resort all real revelation must have been a communication of that kind. The Old Testament, we should probably all say, derives its authority and its permanent value from this, that it records "the word of the Lord that came" to certain selected individuals during the undefined lapse of time between the dawn of human life on this planet and its full noon in the coming of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Die Gestalt des Propheten ist an sich die erste und grundlegende religiöse Gestalt. Im Geiste des Propheten wird durch den Geist Gottes eine unmittelbare Gewissheit, eine innre Anschauung von Dingen gewerkt, welche sich dem Zeugnisse der Sinne entziehen, und welche von der reflectirenden oder speculirenden Vernunft immer nur mit annähernder Wahrscheinlichkeit erkannt werden können. Und so ruht das Wesen einer Offenbarungsreligion durchaus auf Prophetie. Ohne sie giebt es nur Naturreligion oder Philosophie." (Hermann Schultz, *Die Offenbarungsreligion*, &c., p. 214.)

Whether it occurs to readers of the Bible and to preachers of the gospel that these recorded examples of the word of the Lord coming to men are given, not only as treasures of revelation gathered from the past, but as examples of what may be expected from the present, I am unable to say. But this lecture will certainly have failed of its purpose if it leaves an impression that there was anything which ought to be regarded as exceptional or incapable of repetition in the Divine events and the personal communications from God through the Law and the Prophets.

The discussion, then, that is before us may be regarded as twofold: (1) What was the manner of the communication received by the Prophets and Leaders of Israel when "the word of the Lord came" to them? (2) Are there facts in the present day to warrant the belief that as it was, so it is, and shall be?

I. What actually happened when "the word of the Lord came" to those men of old time? Now, without diverging from the matter in

As was  
all said  
elsewhere

1.

2

1.

hand into a discussion of a very different kind, it is necessary to remind ourselves that there are several degrees of accuracy and authenticity in the records which form the Old Testament. By methods familiar enough to the critic it is not difficult to discern between documents which tell the story of events that lie for the writer in a distant past, and documents which are in a sense autographic, the personal experiences of the writer himself or of his immediate contemporaries. It is misleading in the highest degree to make no distinction between two such different authorities. It may be, for example, precarious in the extreme to lay stress on the pious traditions concerning a patriarch which possibly did not find their way into writing until a thousand years after his death; and it would be misleading indeed if we were to argue from the conversation between Abraham and the Lord concerning the destruction of Sodom that we to-day may expect to hold a conversation in that form. But it is a very different matter if we have the actual and



undisputed testimony of a man himself that the communications which passed between him and God were distinct and intelligible and capable of being written down. Little might be inferred, of a practical and experimental kind, from the legend of Enoch or the copious and loving traditions of Abraham, but much may be inferred from the definite statements of Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; and with the experience of these great souls before us we may not only heighten our expectation of what may happen now, but we may also go back into the ages before them and give some rational credence to what is reported from that remote and legendary past.

Now, firmly bearing in mind the distinction which has to be made between the different sources of our information, we may proceed to examine what may be called *the manner of revelation*.

First of all, and on the lowest scale, there *1. Dreams* are the communications of God to men through the inexplicable phenomena of dreams. In the Yahvistic narrative of the Pentateuch there

are many instances given. Two will suffice for illustration. In Gen. xv. 1 we read, "The word of the Lord came unto Abram IN A VISION, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward," and then follows the account of that striking covenant made between Abram and his God, which is the type of all such covenants made since by godly men. The other instance may be taken from Num. xxii. 19-20, where Balaam receives his commands from God by night, presumably in a dream: "God came unto Balaam and said unto him, If the men be come to call thee, rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak unto thee, that shalt thou do."

One example may be added from the Book of Samuel: "It came to pass the same night that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell My servant David," &c. (2 Sam. vii. 4). But similar experiences occur throughout the Bible, and, we may add, throughout the history of the Church.

It is a difficult subject to thoroughly investigate. But it seems to be clear that God uses

It is a difficult subject to thoroughly investigate. But it seems to be clear that God uses  
 1) His chosen  
 2) His word of revelation, to reveal Himself to them,  
 3) His word of promise, to the world, and 2) His word of  
 4) His word of warning, at all times, etc.

the state of semi-consciousness and suspended will-action,

When the dumb hour, clothed with black,  
Brings the dreams about the bed,

to present His commandments, and sometimes to show His purposes for the future, to His servants who wait for Him.

It is scarcely necessary to say that our hours of full consciousness must be very fully surrendered to God if He is thus to appear to us in the hours of half-consciousness, and that our day must be very strenuously and continuously given to Him, if the night is to be the occasion of His closer communion with us.

But, *secondly*, there is a means of revelation to be distinguished from dreams<sup>1</sup> which may be called ecstasy. By obedience, by self-surrender, by prayer, by careful withdrawal from the entanglements of the world, prophetic men entered into a physical and mental state which

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxiii. 25, 28, 32, shows that dreams, as a very uncertain means of communication, were somewhat discredited in the highest period of prophetic activity. (Cf. Hermann Schultz, *Offenbarungsreligion*, p. 250.)

was abnormal, if we are speaking of the common life that men live, but highly normal, if we are speaking of the Divine life which they were meant to live. All that is best and most enduring in human life has been attained by dedicated men of this kind.

If chosen men could never be alone  
In deep mid-silence, open-doored to God,  
No greatness ever had been dreamed or done.<sup>1</sup>

Two significant examples of this condition may be given. Isaiah tells us, in the first person, how he was called to his life-long mission when he was still a boy (Isa. vi.). He was in the Temple, meditating, no doubt, on all that was implied by the sacred building, and on the political, the social, the religious condition of his country. A Divine pageant passed before his eyes. The dark, narrow, lofty chamber seemed to expand and to be illumined with heavenly radiance. There was the Lord, surrounded by His train of burning seraphim. What followed was a transaction

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Lowell.

between the young man and God, evidently as real and tangible to his consciousness as anything that happens between man and man. Language has no meaning, and literature no authenticity, if this is not to be treated as an actual occurrence, an occurrence of thrilling and poetical interest, and yet literally, and even prosaically, recorded. The ecstatic condition is not to be confused with hallucination. It is a form of the Spirit's life, a contact between the visible and the invisible. And so far from these spiritual experiences being discredited because they transcend the common experience of common men, the true meaning of the Spiritual is, as Emerson said, the Real, and these doings in the higher plane are the key and interpretation of life.

The other example which will serve us now is that of Ezekiel. The book of this prophet is so absolutely unimpeachable, its authenticity is so far above suspicion, its careful arrangement and editing give such a sense of deliberation and calm conclusiveness, that the express witness of this writer possesses a peculiar

value. There is something curiously particular and emphatic in the introduction of the book. "There was indeed<sup>1</sup> a word of Yahveh to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans, by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him" (Ezek. i. 3). Ezekiel is no poet; he is quite prosaic; such poetry as appears in his book is the realism of what he saw in vision. One of the least of the prophets in genius, he is one of the greatest in vision. He lived in view of the opened heavens.

*Thirdly*, the word of the Lord evidently came to men, not in dream or in ecstasy, but by a strengthening of the natural faculties, an illumination of the intelligence, which enabled them to see the truth and speak about things present and to come with a wisdom not their own. Keble well expresses it thus:—

As little children lisp and tell of Heaven,  
So thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were  
given.

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew idiom of emphasis הִנֵּה הִנֵּה occurring at the beginning of the sentence lays stress on the actuality of the fact.

Nothing can be more instructive for us than to observe the operation of this human, yet Divine, inspiration. Take, for example, the prophet Micah. He is a man of the people. He is keenly alive to their sufferings and espouses their cause. The intensity of his moral convictions unites him with God; and the truths he utters come to him definitely as God's truths rather than his own. To quote the words of a prophetic student of the prophets: —

“Micah is convinced of Jehovah's spiritual presence with him, and perfectly happy in the faith that his own opinions are the very mind of God, and have arisen in his soul by God's spiritual operation in him. He founds his spiritual life on direct oneness of his spirit and power and activity with the spirit of God. His power to speak, to think aloud, to win or to condemn by eloquent speech, his whole personal beneficent activity is one with the Spirit Jehovah.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archibald Duff, M.A., LL.D., *Old Testament Theology*, p. 325.

Those spiritual directions which shaped the history of Israel, and made the chosen people the forerunner of Christ; those conceptions of God which were the essential condition of receiving the full revelation of God in the Person of Christ; those noble religious truths which abide for ever in the Old Testament, like stars in the firmament, a light shining in a dark place, not superseded even by our fullest and latest knowledge;—were received from God very largely by men of like passions with ourselves, who in simplicity of heart and singleness of purpose threw their minds open to God, and allowed His Spirit to work upon their nature, until the exercise of their judgment on political issues which were before them, the formation of a theology in their glowing hearts, and the careful elaboration of a moral code, were veritable words of God. Not that any infallibility could attach to their utterances. The human factor could not be completely eliminated. It was not given to them to rise entirely above their environment, or to see things out of the forms of time and



space in which their life necessarily moved. Thus, for example, in one of the most striking communications of the word of the Lord to the greatest of all the prophets, Jeremiah, that prophecy in which a promise is made of "a Branch of Righteousness to grow up unto David," it appears from the language employed that the prophet himself expected the throne of David in Jerusalem and the ministrations of the Levites in the Temple to be inviolable and eternal, it not being given to him to understand that throne and temple alike were to disappear and find their fulfilment in the Person of Christ.<sup>1</sup> But in their complete surrender to the will of God, and their constant study of His mind, they became quite consciously the organs of His utterance, and could say without hesitation, in words which no good man can use without a conviction of their truth, words which the prophets, as the events have proved, were fully justified in using, "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying."

Nothing but a close and constant study of

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxxiii. 14-26.

the Prophets can adequately bring out the nature and significance of this inward experience. But one or two observations may be made in passing. Even when the word of the Lord was received by what might be called natural methods, as distinct from dreams and ecstasies—even when it came apparently as the simple exercise of a sound judgment or the utterance of a searching moral truth—the prophet distinguished quite clearly between his own mind, which was the instrument, and the Spirit of God, who was the speaker. The word of the Lord comes into the heart—comes from Him, but it will out. Our own opinions we can always suppress if we will—even our convictions of truth do not always lay upon us the obligation of utterance. But when the word of the Lord is in a man's heart it acts as it did in Jeremiah. "If I say I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain" (Jer. xx. 9).

Again, apart from the ecstatic state in which *Dipsuchia* Isaiah conversed with God, there is, in the quiet and unexcited communion of the soul with its Maker, an interchange of thought — a lofty argument — which can only be expressed in the form of a dialogue. That element of *Dipsuchia* which is often perceived in consciousness, when two contending voices seem to be answering one another in the soul, appears in the experience of the prophet still more distinctly; the argument proceeds between the self and God. Thus Jeremiah gives us a daylight experience; there is no hush or mystery of the night about it; there is no excitement of the Temple service, nor even the agitation of the exiled spirit on the gloomy bank of Chebar; but he says very simply: "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations." Such a voice has surely often sounded in the meditative soul of a young man who has been brought up in a

religious home and nurtured on the lap of prayer. And he is persuaded that God is calling him to be His messenger. To Jeremiah, however, the voice is so objective, and, in the vulgar sense of the word, real, that he answers aloud, "Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." And the dialogue proceeds in perfect sincerity and obvious reality. "But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Then the Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth."<sup>1</sup> Now, if we are to make some allowance for the *naïveté* and imagery of Eastern speech, if we hesitate to affirm that this dialogue was of such a character that indifferent persons standing near would have heard it, or that a hand was put out which sensibly touched the young man's lips, there can yet be no shadow of question that here was a genuine experience, a real contact with

<sup>1</sup> Jer. i. 4-10.

God, a command given, a deprecatory plea, a renewed command with an enabling power, and a clear conviction that henceforth the words to be spoken, though issuing from human lips, should really proceed from the Divine mind. And the whole Book of Jeremiah, notwithstanding the somewhat confused editing, and the frequently cumbersome language, fully justifies the expectation which is created by this remarkable introduction.

It is the same with all the prophets whose writings have come down to us, and after a careful study of their words, and the confession of their call, which they all make with more or less distinctness, we may turn back to those earlier prophets — whose messages were written not by them at the time but by their disciples who cherished the memory of their words — to Elijah, to Samuel, to Moses, and may perceive with a clearer understanding the manner of the Lord's communications to them.

There is no more authentic personality in the Bible than Elijah. Ever since he lived they who have studied his history have agreed

with the widow of Zarephath in her exclamation, "Now I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kings xvii. 24). The word which came to him was that of practical and immediate direction in a bold protest against religious corruption, and a manful championship of spiritual worship, rather than discourses which would instruct after generations. But it is evident that his zeal was created and sustained, and the protest he made was effectual with sovereigns and with people, because upon the watch-tower of Carmel, or in the caves of Horeb, he maintained that solitary communion with God, in which a passionate and devoted soul receives with perfect definiteness "the word of the Lord." Elijah is a noble example of what a man may become who is very jealous for the Lord his God, remains disentangled from the religious forms which happen to prevail at the time, and presses into immediate relations with the Supreme Spirit, to hear His word and to obey.

Going back a little further in the history, we

found a complete copy of the Septuagint

light upon Samuel, a genuine prophet, who received and delivered the word of the Lord. There is a pathetic interest about this man because he lived in one of those periods, far too common in the world's history, when "the word of the Lord is rare, and there is no open vision," a period of formalism, of priestliness instead of religion, when every one was ready to believe that the Lord spoke long ago to the fathers, but not that He was able to speak still. That dedicated child, conceived and born in the throes of prayer and of a mother's faith, stood open-eared to hear what the Lord would say throughout his life. "The word of Samuel came to all;" and rightly so, for it was indeed the word of God. The kingdom was his creation, and the man after God's own heart was his choice, and one of his God-given utterances rings down the ages, and is to-day as loud a voice of God as when it first broke from Samuel's angry lips: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22).

Or, pushing back further still, we come to

Moses.<sup>1</sup> So immediate and decisive was his dealing with God, so important and unexpected was the communication that he received, so distinct was the impression which his life and personality made in Israel, that it occasions no surprise if the Law by which the community lived was always ascribed to him in its entirety, and every addition made to the code, at each successive stage of development, was reverently prefaced by "The Lord spake unto Moses, Speak unto the children of Israel." Though criticism and history, religion and common sense, alike make it impossible to accept the Jewish tradition that all the contents of the Pentateuch were communicated by word of mouth to Moses, there can be no question but that the Lord did speak to Moses, giving him words so vital and eternal that they created a nation which time and change seem powerless to destroy, and founded a religion for a few

<sup>1</sup>For the historical personality of Moses, which emerges from the critical recasting of the Pentateuch, a personality not injured but cleared by the admission of the undeniable facts, see Hermann Schultz. *Die Offenbarungsreligion*, &c., p. 114, &c. Göttingen, 1889.



tribes of Bedouin which had the dynamic forces in it to change and master the world. Whatever we know or do not know about Moses, we are certain that the word of the Lord came to him, and in the words which have come to mankind ever since we always detect some underlying note of the truths communicated on Sinai to that noble and heroic man.<sup>1</sup>

But if we are to complete the scheme of this lecture we must turn from these fascinating inquiries into the history of a distant past, and put the question which refers to the present.

II. *Does the Word of the Lord come to His servants to-day as it came to the Prophets and the Leaders of Israel?* Now we have not reached the stage in the present discussion at which a reasoned answer can be given to this question. Before such an answer can be given we shall have to conceive correctly how the

<sup>1</sup> See Schultz, l. c. p. 118. "Moses ist weder als Philosoph noch als Dichter der Gründer der Religion seines Volkes geworden, sondern als Prophet. Er hat sie *empfangen*, hat sie *religios* aufgenommen, nicht sie denkend geschaffen."

immediate revelations of God are affected by the records of the past revelations not only in the Hebrew Bible, but in the more important writings of the New Testament. But it is possible even at this stage to give two or three illustrations taken from our own century, and from men who have lived among us and been of us, to throw discredit on the faithless supposition that the days of the word of the Lord are in the past, and on that incredible article of faith which is implied in much of our modern religion, that God who was so near to patriarchs and prophets in Canaan that they could hear Him speak and receive directions from His lips, is after all these ages of growing light, and after the consummation of His spiritual revelation, less near, less tangible, less audible, less real to us.

The three examples which I will give shall all be taken from easily accessible sources, and lest I should in any way colour the facts by my own views I shall, at the risk of being wearisome, quote the words of the principal agents themselves. The examples shall be Stephen

Grellet, the Rev. C. G. Finney, and the Rev. Egerton Young.

Here is a passage from the life of Stephen Grellet: —

“Through adorable mercy, the visitation of the Lord was now again extended towards me, by the immediate openings of the Divine light on my soul. One evening, as I was walking in the fields alone, my mind being under no kind of religious concern, nor in the least excited by anything I had heard or thought of, I was suddenly arrested by what seemed to be an awful voice proclaiming the words, ‘Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!’ It reached my very soul, — my whole man shook, — it brought me, like Saul, to the ground. The great depravity and sinfulness of my heart were set open before me, and the gulf of everlasting destruction to which I was verging. I was made bitterly to cry out” — it must be remembered that at this time he considered himself an atheist — “‘If there is no God, doubtless there is a hell.’ I found myself in the midst of it. . . . After that I remained almost whole days and nights,

exercised in prayer that the Lord would have mercy upon me, expecting that He would give me some evidence that He had heard my supplication. But for this I was looking to some outward manifestation, my expectation being entirely of that nature."<sup>1</sup>

This was the commencement of a life — lived in the early part of the present century — hardly less remarkable than the lives of Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is easy to say that the event just described was merely subjective, or even that it was a hallucination. But they who take such a position in the matter will say that the call of Isaiah was hallucination, and the conversation between Jeremiah and God was merely subjective. The purpose for which I cite this illustration is simply to show that the word of the Lord comes to men to-day just as it came to the prophets of Israel.

The second example is a personal experience of Mr. Finney's which must be given in his own words: —

"When I came out of the pulpit in the after-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Stephen Grellet*, p. 13. By Benjamin Seebohm.

noon an aged man approached, and said to me, 'Can you not come and preach in our neighbourhood? We have never had any religious meetings there.' I inquired the direction and the distance, and appointed to preach there the next afternoon, Monday, at five o'clock, in their schoolhouse. . . . I went on foot to fulfil this appointment. The weather was very warm that day, and before I arrived there I felt almost too faint to walk, and greatly discouraged in my mind. I sat down in the shade by the wayside, and felt as if I were too faint to reach there, and, if I did, too much discouraged to open my mouth to the people. When I arrived I found the house full, and immediately commenced the service by reading a hymn. They attempted to sing, but the horrible discord agonised me beyond expression. I leaned forward, put my elbows upon my knees and my hands over my ears, and shook my head withal, to shut out the discord, which even then I could barely endure. As soon as they had ceased to sing I cast myself down upon my knees, almost in a state of desperation. The Lord opened

the windows of heaven upon me and gave me great enlargement and power in prayer. Up to this moment I had had no idea what text I should use on the occasion. As I rose from my knees *the Lord gave me this*: ‘Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city.’ I told the people, as nearly as I could recollect, where they would find it, and went on to tell them of the destruction of Sodom. . . . While I was doing this I was struck with the fact that the people looked exceedingly angry about me. Many countenances appeared very threatening, and some of the men near me looked as if they were about to strike me. This I could not understand, as I was only giving them, with great liberty of spirit, some interesting sketches of Bible history. . . . I turned upon them and said that I had understood that they had never had any religious meetings in that neighbourhood; and, applying that fact, I thrust at them with the sword of the Spirit with all my might. From this moment the solemnity increased with great rapidity. In a few moments there seemed to fall

upon the congregation an instantaneous shock; . . . the Word seemed *literally* to cut like a sword." <sup>1</sup>

I need not quote more. At the second visit Mr. Finney learned for the first time that the place, on account of its wickedness, had been nicknamed Sodom, and the old man who had invited the preacher to visit it was nicknamed Lot because he was the only professor of religion there.

I do not know any instance in the Old Testament of the word of the Lord coming more aptly and powerfully, or in circumstances of greater need and dejection, to a Moses, a Samuel, an Elijah, or any of the prophets whose writings have come down to us.

My third example shall be from a page of modern missionary enterprise. The narrator spent many years in preaching the gospel to the Indians in the Canadian Dominion. He says:—

“On the banks of a wild river, about sixty miles from Beaver Lake, I visited a band of

<sup>1</sup> *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*, p. 237. By Dr. Asa Mahan.

pagan Indians, after a painful and difficult journey, who seemed determined to resist every appeal or entreaty I could make to them. My faithful Indians, my companions, did all they could to rouse them by telling them of their own happy experience. But the people sat shrouded in their blankets, smoking in a sullen indifference, upright and motionless as mummies. Tired out in body and sad at heart, I threw myself upon the help of God and breathed a prayer for guidance in this hour of sore perplexity. God heard me, and springing up I shouted, ‘I know where all your children are, all your dead children! Yes, I know most certainly where all the children are whom Death has taken, the children of the good and the bad. I know where they all are.’ The Indians quickly uncovered their faces and manifested intense interest. I went on : ‘They have gone from your camp-fires and your wigwams. The hammocks are empty and the little bows and arrows lie idle. Your hearts are sad, and you mourn for the children you hear not, and who come not at your call.



But there is only one way to the beautiful land where the Son of God has gone, and into which He takes the children, and you must come this way if you would be happy and enter in.' As I spoke a big, stalwart man from the side of the tent sprang up and rushed towards me. 'Missionary, my heart is empty, and I mourn much, for none of my children are left among the living; very lonely is my wigwam. I long to see them again and to clasp them in my arms. Tell me, missionary, what must I do to please the Great Spirit, that I may enter that beautiful land and see my children again?' He sank at my feet in tears, and was quickly joined by others who, like him, were broken down with grief and anxious for instruction."<sup>1</sup>

Was not that exclamation, "I know where all your dead children are," a veritable word of God? Did ever any saint in Old Testament times receive a more direct or manifest message to deliver? It was the one

<sup>1</sup> From Mr. Egerton Young's deeply interesting book, *By Canoe and Dog Train*.

point where the callousness of that congregation was penetrable. The missionary had no means of knowing where that one point was. And the word of the Lord came to him. He gave it, and with such result as might be expected.

The method of God is one in all ages. Every one who is to speak for Him must hear Him speak. With distinct and personal application the word must come: "As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Son of man, all My words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thy heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (Ezek. iii. 9-11).

9-11).  
The first expression is "the  
of the universe, as such, is God's  
being; it is from him that all things  
exist, & every creature is his  
work."

### LECTURE III.



## LECTURE III.

### THE WORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

To one who has been patiently investigating and quietly pondering the significance of the expression, “The word of the Lord came,” in the Old Testament history and prophecy, it gives a shock of mild surprise to turn over the leaves of the Bible, and to read in the New Testament — yes, and as the middle point and pivot of the New Testament — the fact that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” He may not be curious to inquire how the use of an expression in the Targums, and the coining of a cognate term in the philosophical schools of Alexandria, prepared the way for the truth with which the Fourth Gospel opens. He may be simply content to accept the Biblical writings as they stand, and to

use them as their own interpreter. And then his surprise will pass into a glowing wonder and admiration. For it appears that the Word of God, which through many advancing centuries had come, in syllables and letters, to the men of old, a Divine language finding expression in human lips that were more or less able to give it utterance, at last in the fulness of time came, not in this partial and fragmentary way, lisping in alternate exclamations and silences, but embodied in a Person full of grace and truth.

When we realise that this is the gist of the New Testament—the Word of God is incarnate, and men have “beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father”—we are compelled to face some very searching questions which suggest themselves from the standpoint of the present inquiry. We have been arguing all along that the word of the Lord comes directly as a message from God to the individual soul, and that this immediate communication is the condition of real preaching. But if the examples we have examined in the

Old Testament belong to an imperfect and preparatory stage of revelation; if it is the mark and the characteristic of those kings and prophets in that elder time that —

Vainly they tried the deeps to sound  
 E'en of their own prophetic thought,  
 When of Christ crucified and crown'd  
 His Spirit in them taught :

But He their aching gaze repressed,  
 Which sought behind the veil to see,  
 For not without us fully blest  
 Or perfect might they be ;<sup>1</sup>

if the historic Person of Jesus, the Christ, was the utterance in its completeness of the Word which had only been given in portions before; perhaps we may be driven to the conclusion that with the Incarnation the prophetic element in religion — by which I mean the immediate revelation of God to the individual soul, and the deliverance of a message through a human mouthpiece — passed away. At first sight it might seem that the absoluteness of

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Year.* Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

the truth, that Christ is the Word of God, refutes and nullifies the argument of the present lectures.

It is our task to-day to see whether this first impression is correct. The only way of determining the question is to examine the New Testament writings, which, following the Incarnation, furnish us with the clearest view of the religious experiences to be expected in the new era created by the coming of Christ. But it will promote clearness in the inquiry if I state beforehand the conclusion to which, as it seems to me, we shall be led. We shall find that the first impression was wrong. The appearance of the Word in the flesh was not to abolish the prophetic element, but to make it general, by realising the aspiration of the first great prophet, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" The Person of Christ was to furnish a norm or type of what each one might become who received the Word. Henceforth there would always be an effectual test to prove whether the word received were a word of God or not, because nothing could



be a word of God which clashes with the Word made flesh. Henceforth, through the operation of the Holy Spirit the personality of Christ should be reproduced in the believer, in such a way that the Christ-filled soul would speak the word of God; but it would be the utterance or expression of that Divine Person who "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So far from the new order nullifying the old prophetic inspiration, and reducing the ministers of the gospel to a position in relation to God inferior to that of the older prophets, it, as one might have expected, fulfilled and realised the promise in that old relation, and substituted for the occasional coming of the Word to a few favoured individuals at exceptional times, a normal state for believing men which could thus be described by a Christian writer—"the word of the Lord dwelling in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto

God" (Col. iii. 16). The prophets did not cease in the Christian Church, and one of the earliest documents we have from that primitive society, the *Didaché*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, reveals to us the constant activity and the careful regulation of these men who received the word from God to deliver to the people.<sup>1</sup>

Now let us turn to the New Testament writings for light upon this subject.

To begin with, the last of the Prophets,—the Old Testament Prophets,—is a contemporary of Jesus. Our historian, in describing the career of John the Baptist, uses the familiar expression, "The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke iii. 2). The final announcement of the coming Messiah, of the One who already stood among the people, though they knew it not,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. in the *Didaché*, τοῖς δὲ προφήταις ἐπιτρέπετε εὐχαριστεῖν ὅσα θέλουσιν (chap. x.), περὶ δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν κατὰ τὸ δόγμα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὕτως ποιήσατε (chap. xi.), with which compare Luke xi. 49; Acts xi. 27; xiii. 1; xv. 32; xxi. 10; 1 Cor. xii. 28, 29; xiv. *passim*; Eph. ii. 20; iii. 5; iv. 11.

was a word coming to an individual, whom all counted as a prophet, and a word coming, as we have observed it often does, in the wilderness. But the Incarnate WORD OF GOD, thus designated by the word of God that came to John, does not immediately appear to the world as THE WORD. On the contrary, He speaks the word much as the prophets spoke before Him, though with more fulness. We are told that "the multitude pressed upon Him, and heard the word of God" (Luke v. 1). He speaks of His teaching as "the word of God" in the parable of the Sower and the seed (Luke viii. 2); and He counts it a mark of relationship with Him to hear the word of God and to do it (Luke viii. 21), for to hear the word of God and to keep it is more blessed, He declares, than to have stood to Him in the beautiful relation of mother (Luke xi. 28). It would seem that even in that clearer revelation of Himself, the gist of which is preserved in the Fourth Gospel, He did not actually describe Himself as the Word of God, though His relation to that Word is

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not obscurely hinted at in the remarkable argument: "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken, say ye of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" (John x. 35, 36), the purport of which would seem to be that, if the fragmentary reception of the Word which came to the men of old gave them a certain title to Divinity, He, the Son of God, might well be supposed to have the word of God in its fulness, and to express it perfectly.

Still, it remains true that the Christ "after the flesh" does not, while He is in the flesh, stand forth before the world as the Word of God. It is only when He has gone away, as it was expedient for Him to do, that, on the one hand, He appears as the full-orbed utterance of God in His historic manifestation, and, on the other hand, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a way is provided by which the Word in its fulness can be communicated to those who believe.

The main body of the New Testament writings is occupied with this twofold theme — how Christ is the Perfect Word of God, and how men receiving Him receive the word, and, realising Him inwardly, are filled with the word, and, proclaiming Him, declare the word of God, all by the operation, or rather the manifold operations, of the Holy Spirit.

It is of course true to say that holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and even more specifically “searched what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto” (1 Pet. i. 11), but the signal baptism of the Spirit which followed the departure of Christ from the earth was distinguished from those earlier movements of the Spirit in two ways. First, it was, as the prophets themselves had foreseen, for all flesh, and not for a favoured few only; second, it had a specific function and mode of working. It was the result of the exaltation of the victorious Saviour, and itself resulted in presenting the Saviour to the hearts of men, the Saviour in all His fulness,

as the rightful Lord of the human heart and of the human race, the Sovereign to whom all knees should bow.

Accordingly the Apostles thus baptized from on high manifested a new and remarkable power, which is thus described: "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."<sup>1</sup> The precise nature of that word is presented to us not only in their speeches, but in the results of that Spiritual ministry; and it is very instructive to notice how the phrase "the word of God" is used in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles regard themselves as entrusted with a *διακονία τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ*, a service of the word of God, which they must prosecute with the closest attention, free from the ordinary distractions of business.<sup>2</sup> No one who pays attention to the subject matter of the Bible can suppose that by "the word of God" is here meant the Old Testament Scriptures. The whole story shows that what the apostles intended was,

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vi. 2, 4.

that close relation to God which would enable them to receive the things of Christ as a speaking message, and to present them with boldness, *i.e.*, with the freedom and force of a communication coming direct from God to the people. The word of God was, to put it briefly, the witness to Jesus, as one of the earliest New Testament writers expresses it, the one "who bare witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw."<sup>1</sup>

And this passage, we may observe in passing, illustrates the truth, that in the new Order no less than in the old the word of God would, on occasion, be communicated by visions. Peter in a trance would receive the grand truth that the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews; and Paul would, in ecstasy, be caught up to see things, which might not be communicable by speech, but would yet give to what he did say the rare impression of a heavenly atmosphere and a Divine authority.

But to return to the Acts of the Apostles:

<sup>1</sup> Rev. i. 2, 9; vi. 9; xx. 4.

it was this word of God, consisting in the testimony of Jesus, that constituted the Apostolic message, which men received or rejected, and which rolled along in those glad and glowing days like a brimming river broadening as it flowed.<sup>1</sup> It was not a written document, except in the metaphorical sense that it was written on fleshy tables of the heart, and could be said to permanently abide in those who genuinely believed.<sup>2</sup> It was not a message learned by rote. It was not the announcement that Jesus was the Word. But it was that immediate and conscious reception of a word from God, which, though the actual burden of it was kept within the limits of the Personality and the historical manifestation of Jesus, had all the properties of a new communication, leaping out as a sword<sup>3</sup> from the scabbard to cut into the heart of the hearer, and to separate, to distinguish, to convince, and to convert by its penetrating power.

<sup>1</sup> Acts viii. 14; xi. 1; xiii. 7, 44, 46; xix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> See 1 John ii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. vi. 17, *The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*



No theory could be more misleading, or more likely to devitalise the teaching of the New Testament, than that which identifies the “sword of the Spirit, the word of God” with the text of Scripture. The most prevailing word in the Acts of the Apostles was the proclamation of Jesus, the Word of God, not the quotation of Scripture. And though it is true that the Spirit will frequently bring the words of Scripture to the mind of the Bible-reader, words not contained in Scripture may be just as truly given by the Spirit, as, for example, we saw in the last lecture that Mr. Egerton Young received from God the word, “I know where all your dead children are.” And in the *Acts* themselves, it was just as truly a word of God which came to the Evangelist, when —

’Twas silent all and dead  
 Beside the barren sea,  
 Where Philip’s steps were led —  
 Led by a voice from Thee —  
 He rose and went, nor asked Thee why,  
 Nor stayed to heave one faithless sigh, —

that, I say, was just as much a word of God as the speech he gave to the Eunuch shortly after, when "he opened his mouth, and beginning from that Scripture, preached unto him Jesus."

But if we would rightly apprehend from the inside what the coming of the word of the Lord to a Christian must mean, it is necessary to study the writings of St. Paul. His mind and its manifold operations are laid bare to us with a singular fulness in his letters. And though it may be true that there are things in the letters which are hard to be understood, the man himself and the contact between him and his God, the communication he received from Heaven, and the measure of Christ, if we may use the expression, in which it was all delivered, are precisely the elements which can be easily apprehended by a tolerably careful reader. It is very evident that whatever knowledge St. Paul possessed of the subject matter of the Gospels, he made little or no use of it. It is almost equally evident, though it would take us too far afield to show it in detail to one who was disposed to

*But how does it help when we have the word in the New Testament?*

question it, that though he constantly quotes the Old Testament Scriptures, he does not derive his message from them. Quite the contrary, he forces them to give his message. So absolutely sure is he of the word which he has to deliver, that he is very apt to quote from the Law and the Prophets language which supports his teaching, without any inquiry whether he is expressing the thought of his authorities. From first to last, from the *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, on to the disputed *Pastoral Letters*, it is clear that St. Paul is declaring what he has derived from God at first hand. This, indeed, is the note of his writing. It is the comparative absence of this note more than anything else which leads us to question the authenticity of some among the letters. It is this which has led the Church to treat the Pauline Literature as Revelation. In St. Paul you have in a marked degree, and can observe almost at leisure, the word of the Lord coming to a man, to a Christian man, and in Christian forms. It will not be necessary to make an exhaustive

study of the Letters, for a few selected examples will bring up before your minds what must be indeed familiar to every Bible-reader. Take a passage from the earliest letter which has come down to us. Forgive me if I translate it with a bald literalness which will perhaps emphasise its significance. "We give thanks to God," he says, "without intermission, because you, having received the word — in hearing from us — of God, accepted it not as a word from human minds, but as what it really is, the word of God, which also works in you that believe."<sup>1</sup> There is no uncertain sound about that. The word of God had come direct to the speaker, and he expected the hearer to recognise it as God's, and not man's; and, speaking now to those who believe, he looks for their confirmation of the claim he makes in the experience which they have had of this energising word within themselves.

Strong and distinct as is his claim to have received the word himself, he does not wish to make an exclusive claim; he is best pleased

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 13.

when his converts have so opened their ears that they can perceive the word of God for themselves; when, as St. John would phrase it, they would not need any one to teach them, because the anointing of the Holy One would be within them. And how entirely absorbed he is in the conviction of this inward communication to himself, he shows at the close of this Epistle, where he delivers the remarkable forecast about the course of the resurrection "by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 15), a forecast which certainly implies that the word which came to him was as clear and specific as a voice speaking in his ear.

There is another expression in those early letters to Thessalonica which shows that already to the imagination of St. Paul this Word of the Lord, communicated inwardly, was assuming an objective body of reality, as if it were a living force working from without upon human souls, "The word of God, which liveth and abideth,"<sup>1</sup> according to St. Peter's phrase. This expression also from its very

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. i. 23.

form suggests how closely the word of God was in the Apostle's mind identified with the person of Christ, the nimbus, the aureole, the halo, with which He Himself comes always enswathed. The expression I refer to is that in 2 Thess. iii. 1, "Pray that the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as [it ran] towards you [and was glorified];" so true is it that the Word of the Lord, in the New Testament, has ceased to be a mere breath, or emanation, a broken fragment of speech — fragmentarily received — it is another term for the whole Godhead as revealed to men.

The secret of this experience is partially explained in the autobiographic passage of a letter written a little later — the Epistle to the Galatians. The Church has never failed to marvel at the boldness — or, as she at first thought it, the effrontery — of St. Paul's claim, that he received "his gospel" not from man, not from the apostles, but immediately, "through revelation of Jesus Christ." It certainly is very amazing to find a man — a contemporary of Jesus, who did not know Him

personally, and after His death spent some months in resisting His claims and persecuting His followers—presuming to stand up and oppose the men who were the companions of His life, the witnesses of His death, and the special depositaries of His commission. The thrilling interest of the first two chapters of Galatians lies in this, that they inform us in the words of the man himself how this extraordinary position was assumed. From the very first, it seems, the word of the Lord came to him directly—and it came full-orbed, for it came in the person of Jesus Christ “revealed within him.” Whether Ananias spoke to him, and the experiences of Damascene Christians were in his ear, or he was in solitude, in the city or the desert, meditating over the inner revelation, it was all one; the word of the Lord was in him, and he found his real illumination in patiently listening to Him who was speaking from heaven, until he could issue from the place of the oracle with a *ῥῆμα Χριστοῦ*<sup>1</sup> indeed to deliver, and

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 17.

a full body of doctrine and prophecy which he had received, and was ever afresh "receiving," as he puts it, "from the Lord." His confidence is overmastering—the revelation is so distinct and irresistible, that he bears down with an almost tyrannous strength on those whose convictions were obtained only at second-hand: "What, was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone? If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> And though he clearly recognises that it is possible to receive the word of the Lord correctly, and yet to deliver it inaccurately and in a perverted form, he is quite clear in his own conscience upon that subject: "We are not as the many, corrupting the word of God; but as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ;" "not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of the truth com-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 36, 37.



mending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." <sup>1</sup>

It is from this point of view that we obtain a new light on the amazing figure of speech several times employed by St. Paul, that the true Christian — and the Apostle speaks from his own experience — is a Temple of God. The figure only ceases to be amazing to us because we only imperfectly realise what the Temple was in Judaism; nor can we very much help out our imagination by even the most exaggerated estimate of sacred buildings that prevails in Christendom; the Catholic veneration for a cathedral is but a poor and semi-pagan reflection of what the Jew felt for the Temple. It was the *one place* where God appeared; here must every sacrifice be offered; jealously guarded even by the penalty of death from every alien intrusion, it could be served only by ministrants who were absolutely pure; in its sombre chamber, lighted only by the seven-branched candlestick and the dull glow of the altar of incense, the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 17; iv. 1.

thoughts were turned to that which was behind the veil, the Holy of Holies, where the light was the immediate shining of God, and the written Law was covered with an interpreting spirit, and supplemented by the Urim and Thummim, the Lights and the Perfections of a lively oracle that directed the inquiring priest. Such a temple St. Paul claimed to be, and required his converts to become. His own body was the only temple of worship he knew; there every sacrifice had to be offered that God could claim; sanctified and purified, all alien thoughts excluded, it alone could be the scene of Divine manifestation; intrinsically dark and blind, receiving all its illumination from the sevenfold spirit, it yet contained behind the veil, if the persistent Will would wait and penetrate it, a veritable Shekinah, a voice that spoke, an immediate communion with God. There were the inexhaustible stores of revelation; and the distracted, persecuted man had learnt to rejoice in the shaking of many established things, the threatened destruction of the Temple on

Mount Zion, the insufficiency of the Ancient Law, the disadvantage of not knowing Christ after the flesh, the constant sufferings incurred in the task of preaching Christ as he did know Him, because everything had, in God's hands, worked towards this great consummation, that the word of God was communicated to him within, the word of God rounded out into the fulness of Jesus Christ. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake," he exclaims, "and fill up, on my part, that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church; whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to you-ward, to *fulfil the word of God*, even the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations, but now hath it been manifested to His saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory."<sup>1</sup>

It is plain that St. Paul would not have

<sup>1</sup> Col. i. 24-27.

regarded himself as a minister of the Church at all if he had simply been a priest, dealing with *opera operata* and mechanical mysteries. Hardly more valuable would he have esteemed a ministry which consisted in the diligent study and proclamation of a creed or the eloquent reproduction of other men's experiences. What he regarded as essential to a genuine ministry was an open vision obtained in the secret chamber of the inner life, Christ within as the hope of glory, a word of God, genuine and authentic, to be there received, and faithfully fulfilled—fulfilled, we may suppose, in the effectual delivery of it, so that it might, according to the phraseology of the *Acts*, “grow and prevail”<sup>1</sup>—grow like a living seed that is put into appropriate soil, and be strong like a tree that is rooted, and produces the miracle of fruit.

We have dwelt at some length on the fact and the manner of the word of the Lord coming to St. Paul, because his own letters give us a deeper insight into his experience

<sup>1</sup> Acts xix. 20.

than we can gain into the psychological phenomena of other New Testament writers. But it is very important to realise that St. Paul was not exceptional. The other Apostolic men had the same resources, the same open vision, the same authentic note, the same proof of their ministry.

Is it possible, in the light of what St. Paul reveals of himself, to press a little closer, and to realise more distinctly still those communications, which came to the men, which were delivered with more or less fulness in their preaching and writings, and have come down to us in the volume of the New Testament?

In pausing and meditating on this question, we must be careful not to limit the experience of those favoured men by our own experience to-day; for, though we can only interpret theirs by our own, it may be of the last importance for us to recognise how far theirs surpassed ours, because theirs is set before us as the goal of attainment to which we must constantly aspire. Why should we be so eager to eliminate the Supernatural? The Super-

natural is precisely what we want now and for ourselves.

This, then, would seem to be the psychological experience of the apostles which gave the demonstration and power to their preaching, and the victorious impulse to their work: — They had before them a great historic fact, which was the fulfilment of a long historic preparation. The Christ had come. He had lived, suffered, and died, and from the height of His ascension had sent a new spiritual Power to be received by those who obeyed Him. They had obeyed, and had received the Spirit. This meant an inward re-creation, which it is, thank God, easier to experience than to describe. It meant, for one thing, a life following on a death and resurrection in the manner of their Lord's, that is to say, a sense, acquired through faith, of their own inner nature being crucified, and nailed dead to the Cross, and of a new creation emerging from this inner tomb, a creation in the likeness of Christ Jesus. But it meant, further, a life lived day by day which could only be called

a resurrection life, a life inwardly cleansed from sin, a life in which every thought was brought into subjection to Christ, a life which was characterised by a sustained emotion of love to God and to man, like the tides of a fountain which flow continually and never fail.

Now in this cleansed inner life, lived by faith in the Son of God, not unnaturally new powers were developed; spiritual things became strong and even dominant, while the things which are seen lost relatively their importance; the spiritual vision of God became calm and clear, and the turmoil without could not drown the voice within; the wide misery of the world appeared clearly as a want of God, the remedy for the misery lay in the removal of sin and the recovery of the inward vision which results from the inward victory; the serene assurance of Christ, and His complete sufficiency to cope with the disastrous consequences of sin, emboldened and strengthened this "inner man," while the love of God shed abroad in the heart impelled them to seek and to save the victims of sin: hence came the secret of a new power,

a twin birth with the secret of a deeper knowledge. Under these circumstances, not only did the will act in harmony with the will of God, but the mind, brought into subjection to Christ, moved as the mind of Christ. The thoughts which arose in their understanding, and shaped themselves into connected arguments, were, quite consciously, not their thoughts, but His. If it was desirable to correct these subjective impressions by the words that He had spoken in the flesh, it was not necessary, nor was it always possible. The Spirit within took of the things of Christ and revealed them, with a more immediate authority and a more trustworthy guarantee against mistakes than could be yielded by any traditions or documents of the Master's earthly life. Thus some of these men openly declared that they no longer knew Christ after the flesh, but could follow unquestioningly the commandments which came to them from Him in the Spirit.

Born again, cleansed, surrendered, enlightened, they were able to receive the Word of



God in their hearts, and to deliver it with astonishing results, of which the *Acts of the Apostles* preserve some striking examples, and to which the Epistles of St. Paul give a constant witness. Signs and wonders were wrought. God-filled men were able to bring the powers of God into contact with death and disease, with doubt and opposition, with sorrow and shame and sin, and to show that in all these things God in them was the Conqueror.

Now, without pressing any further this illustration of our theme, derived from the New Testament writings, it is legitimate to observe, and indeed no one will be inclined to dispute, that the one condition of success in all the ministry of the Word to-day is the repetition of the experience which the first apostles enjoyed. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by the wholly unscriptural dogma that what happened to the apostles must not be expected to happen to us. Their own words are a sufficient refutation of this baseless and ignoble theory: they desired that we should be imitators of them, and that we should be in

all points such as they, because they knew that the continuance of the work after their death would entirely depend on other men arising — successors to the apostles indeed — who would press as they had done into the inner circle of the oracle, who would receive as they had done the authentic word of God from God Himself, and would declare this Word of God, as they had done, not in the deadness of the letter, but in the fulness of the spirit, that it might “grow and be multiplied” (Acts xii. 24), each new believer becoming a new organ of the Spirit, and each new preacher receiving the office of a prophet. In this way they had learned Christ, the perfect Word of God, not as a peculiar treasure for themselves to possess and to manipulate, but as a vast treasure open to all, a living source of life and instruction and power which every believer might humbly approach and appropriate, and every veritable preacher might administer and dispense.

Gentlemen, I would commend to you this Apostolic Succession.

## LECTURE IV.



## LECTURE IV.

### THE BIBLE AND THE WORD OF GOD.

AFTER examining in the two previous lectures the Old and the New Testaments in order to comprehend "the coming of the word of the Lord" to the "holy men of old," it is well for us to put the question, How are we to regard, in what place are we to put, in what manner are we to treat, the whole Book, or Bible, which has often been called, by a careless inexactness of speech, "The Word of God"? Or, to put it more tersely, the subject of the present lecture is, "The Preacher and the Bible."

The habit of calling the Canon of Sacred Scripture the Word of God, a term so significant and so unique, a term employed so specifically in more than one place to describe the

Saviour Himself, is likely to give rise, and has often given rise, to serious misconceptions. There is no authority for the usage in the Bible itself—even a very ordinary attention to the character and composition of the Book shows that the designation is quite inappropriate—and to confuse the understanding of believers and unbelievers by treating elements which are obviously and characteristically human as if they were characteristically and authoritatively Divine, is to cast stumbling-blocks in the way of the weak and the ignorant.

I say there is no foundation in the Bible itself for the common practice of speaking of it as the Word of God. Boldly challenge those who thoughtlessly employ the term. Ask them, What reason have you for the presupposition, what support in Scripture, what assurance of prophet or apostle, what hint of the Lord Himself, that this collection of writings may be fitly described by so august a name? Startled as many good people are by the question, they yet, if they are honest, are bound to

admit that the usage is without Scriptural authority; if they are dishonest, they angrily turn upon those who put the question and denounce them as infidels.

An examination of the Bible itself shows that the authors of the books, which compose it, did not dream of making the claim that what they were writing was written by God, or spoken by God. Again and again, from Genesis to Revelation, things are recorded which came to prophets and kings and apostles as the word of God, but never does an author hint that his book, as such, is the immediate utterance of God. Even Jeremiah — to take a salient example, as he is the greatest of the prophets — even Jeremiah, who tells us so unhesitatingly that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book” (Jer. xxx. 2), does not for a moment suggest that all the words in his book were spoken to him by the Lord; he does not, for example, imply that the sorrowful cry of his distressed heart, “O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was de-

ceived" (Jer. xx. 7), was a word spoken to him by the Lord; he trusted to the sagacity of the reader, never dreaming of the cult of Bibliolatry which was to be the strange birth of time, to perceive that this was spoken to the Lord by him, and not by the Lord through him.

But if the Book of Jeremiah, which teems with "the word of the Lord," cannot with exactness be described by that title itself, how much less can we apply the title to historical books, which, for all their Divine teaching and imperishable value, betray on every page the characteristics of human historical composition, or to such a mixed literature as is comprised in the Hagiographa, ranging down from inspired Psalms, in which the Divine Spirit pants and cries audibly in a human song, to the graceful pessimism of Ecclesiastes, where the human spirit, groping after God, hardly attains to a questioning recognition of His wisdom and authority?

The loose and careless habit of describing the Bible as the Word of God is more than any other single cause responsible for the in-



fidel literature which has flooded the Protestant world in the last century and the present. Poor Tom Paine shattered his soul, and made shipwreck of faith, in a frenzied protest against the obvious error, and was met by the sleek orthodoxy of the Eighteenth Century with loathing and vituperation. I have in my possession a volume entitled *God and His Book*, written by a living author who is treading in the stony path of Paine and plunging down the same hopeless precipice. Starting with the unthinking dogma of orthodoxy that the Bible as such is the Word of God, he has little difficulty in culling innumerable passages which present, on that showing, insuperable objections; passages the ascription of which to the mouth or the finger of God is indeed a kind of blasphemy; and then, involved in these sinuous toils by the inconsiderate error of Christendom, he writhes and shrieks until the heart of the true Christian sickens with pity and sorrow for him.

It should be part of the obligation to truth

which every living preacher feels laid upon him, to deliver the Church from the confusion, and the mischief, and the error, which have been incurred by this one baseless notion that a Book written by human pens and handed down by human methods, transcribed, translated, compiled, by fallible human minds, is or can be, as such, the Word of God.

But having guarded ourselves against this common error, we may turn to the more congenial task of marking what the Bible is. It is, to put it briefly, the sacred and inspired record of the Word of God, which came, as we saw in the two previous lectures, during the course of ages, to the chosen leaders of God's chosen people, to the faultless Person, who Himself perfectly embodied it, and to the immediate witnesses of His historic manifestation, who in testifying to Jesus Christ were testifying to the Word of God in its final fulness and progressive potency.

It needs no argument to show that the record of such a gradual, age-long coming of

the word of the Lord to men deserves and demands the close and constant study of every one who in the present day and to his own generation is called to deliver the word of God. Nay more, it would seem to be, as a general rule, a condition laid down by God Himself that, if we would hear Him speaking to us now, we should first study, understand, and assimilate this great historic word which He spoke to the fathers. The "word" that has been given from of old is the lamp to our feet, even when we are climbing the mount of vision, and entering at the perilous portal of the oracle where God speaks face to face with His servant.

Every true preacher must therefore be an earnest Bible student. He must spare no pains, and neglect no method, to master and grasp the Book. He must know what it is; he must know what it is not. He must learn what it contains; he must learn what it necessarily does not contain. He must enter into it with such a living and realising appreciation that he treads firmly in its multifarious paths,

and can perceive where the human blends with the Divine, how God is speaking in human voices, and how the distinction is to be made between the authentic Word of God and the language of man in which it must be expressed.

It is a mighty task, this of the preacher!  
The cry in his soul is always —

Show me thy favoured haunt, Eternal Voice,  
The region of thy choice,  
Where, undisturbed by sin and earth, the soul  
Owns Thy entire control.

And he knows, from the experience of fifty generations, and by an instinct which has come to him in the familiar handling of the page from childhood, that the mountain range, whence the prospect is given to his view, where the caves of God afford shelter to the listening soul, and the interests and preoccupations of earth pass into the atmosphere and revelation of Heaven, is this Book, which is put into his hand by his mother, and lies closer and closer to his heart every day, until

from one or another of its exalted rock-ledges he passes into the open vision of God.

Many of the greatest preachers have found the Bible so inexhaustible that they have laid aside all other books, and meditated in this Law day and night. Mistaken as this course may be, it need afford little ground for wonder. To understand the Bible is a task for a lifetime; Bible reading leads to Bible study; Bible study leads to absorption in the Bible. And though we may feel it necessary to maintain, that in order to understand the Bible many other books must be read, and a thousand related paths of inquiry must be pursued, we may very safely propound it as a principle for the preacher that the Bible shall be the *Arx* or crowning *Arcopagus* of his mental life, so that all studies group themselves as subordinate shrines and dwellings around it, so that all inquiries start from it, and return laden to it again.

Or to use a figure which emerged in the previous lecture, if the preacher is to regard himself as a living temple of God's self-manifestation, with a *Holy of Holies* where the

traffic between him and his God goes on, then in the Ark of the Covenant and under the shelter of the Cherubim shall be hidden the Bible, as his tables of the Law. With his eyes on this Book he will most frequently be aware of the Divine Presence, and through these familiar words flushing up into new meaning, meaning ever new and more surprising, with

Magic as of morn  
Bursting for ever newly-born  
On forests old,  
Waking a hoary world forlorn  
With touch of gold,

he shall again and again hear the creating voice of God, the soft pleadings of the Divine heart, the deep breathings of the Holy Spirit. The Book will not be superseded,— other truths will grow, but their germs will be found there. New knowledge will be gathered, but it will only interpret the old. He began with the Bible, and such is its quality, its Divine quality, that he will end with it.

The rest of this lecture, then, may well be

bestowed on six of the many related ways in which the life-long Bible study may be pursued. They shall be enumerated and then elucidated. *First*, there is what we may call simple Concordance work. *Second*, there is Introduction work, or the careful study of a book at a time. *Third*, there is the systematic reading of the book as a whole. *Fourth*, there is the scholar's work, philological and exegetical. *Fifth*, there is the critic's work. *Lastly*, and supremely, there is the devotional use of the book. All these ways of Bible assimilation may, and should, blend with one another. No one who is to teach can safely dispense with any of them — and, strictly speaking, the spirit of the other five must be carried into each method in turn. But as we come to know a mountain country by many separate expeditions, and as we become intimate with a dear friend by many distinct, though connected, methods of communication, so we learn the way about the Bible, and become adepts in its understanding and its use, by having at our side, if one may so phrase it, six Bibles, each used in its own

particular way. The six modes are twisted into one cord by the living spirit and the practical needs of the reader.

1. As simple concordance work is within the reach of every one, however untrained and unscholarly he may be, so it remains like the common ingredients of daily food, indispensable for even the advanced student. There are great leading ideas of the religious life which run, like golden threads in a woven tapestry, through the Bible from beginning to end, and are not adequately appreciated even by assiduous Bible readers until they are carefully and connectedly followed out. To borrow an illustration from the subject at present in hand, no one is likely to apprehend aright what is meant by the Word of God—to see how inexact and inappropriate it is to apply the term to the Bible as a whole, or to catch the supreme importance of the truth that the Word may come, and does come, immediately to men in all ages—until he has taken up the Bible and followed out the use of the expression in the successive books,



somewhat in the manner that was pursued in the two last lectures.

It is often a matter of surprise and admiration to me to observe how little this form of Bible study is hindered by all the anomalies of our modern translations. The results are of course more exact if Fuerst and Trommius and Bruder are used instead of Cruden; and the Christian minister who tries to share with his people the results of that closer acquaintance with the original, which is often his peculiar gift in the Church, will confer a vast benefit upon his hearers. But, on the other hand, he may be well content to share with the humblest of his flock the golden fruit which grows from a right use of Cruden. Some of his own deepest inspirations will come to him when he has just traced out all through the Scriptures the use of such a term as Grace or Love. Some of his most serviceable and illuminating discourses will result from shutting his commentaries and trying to expound afresh the meaning of a familiar idea, such as Justification, or Holiness, by dili-

gently collecting and collating and arranging the passages throughout the Bible in which they occur. Often he will himself be driven to his knees, and take all his people with him, in confession and contrition and believing intercession, after going through his Bible with the key-word Prayer, and observing how many things were wrought by prayer, how constantly holy men prayed, prayed the more the better they were, and how solemnly this command has always come from God as the condition of all blessing, "Continue instant in prayer."

2. The second and indispensable method of Bible study is based on the fact, which grows more and more wonderful with every new discovery in archæology and in ancient literature, that notwithstanding the unity of the Bible—the unity of purpose and historical development—it consists of articulated parts, each of which is in its turn a unity. Each book has its own historical and literary setting—each book has an atmosphere of its own. Apart altogether from that Criticism—a distinct

form of study — which has done much to change the venue of a few among the books of the collection, it is good, and even necessary, to take each book as it stands in our Bibles and read it as a whole, if possible at a sitting. It is not a little remarkable that though the Hexateuch, for example, is a single work, compiled from similar sources, and finally edited by a single hand, each of its six books, or parts, has a character, an *ἦθος*, of its own. Genesis is not liable to confusion with Exodus, though the narrative flows on with no wider gap than occurs in every historical work. Leviticus and Numbers stand interlocked, but quite distinct. Deuteronomy is a complete and unified work which might stand alone without looking backward or forward. And Joshua is so marked off from the preceding books, that it requires a certain effort to recognise that it belongs to them, in just the same sense that the sixth chapter of Macaulay's history belongs to the preceding five.

And so we might range through all the dear and familiar list. If we want sometimes to set

one book side by side with another, as, for instance, to compare *Chronicles* with the older history, or to examine two kindred Epistles, like *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, in one study, yet we always want to keep each colophon of the great tale by itself, and to treat it lovingly and particularly, as a distinct gem, before we put it in the casket with the rest — to tell the beads in our rosary one by one before we put the whole around our neck and clasp it to our bosom.

Even in that central point of the Bible organism where the harp which utters the dark-bright saying of the Saviour's life and death has four distinct strings, they do not half understand the music who know only the chord of the four strings, but have not drawn the special tone from each. We may with Irenæus, though on different grounds, see a Divine wisdom in a fourfold gospel-narrative being given to us rather than one harmonised whole. The harmony is good, but the four voices are better; and he has gone but a little way in the study of the Evangel who does not

recognise in a moment the note of each evangelist, who has not seized on Mark for his brevity, to read him at a sitting — studied Matthew for the wonder of a Jew opening his eyes to the Gospel, Luke for the width of the Gentile world finding its Saviour, and John for the mystical evolution of the Saviour's life in the experience of the believer.

3. But the study of topics and books will not absolve us, to my thinking, from a constant and steady perusal of "a chapter a day," year in and year out, revolving the scroll of the Word with the rolling seasons.

No study of parts or aspects will do for study of the whole. We must be within hail of any voice sounding from the enchanted district. To bury oneself in one valley or to wander along a few green pastures will not suffice. I do not rest in the teaching of the man who sits all day on the Mount where the Lord preached His sermon, but never hears the reverberations from Sinai or the deep-toned answer from Calvary. I like well enough a visit to the Nile or to Euphrates, and the best attention given to

Abana and Pharpar; but not to the neglect of Jordan, the home-stream that cleaves the Holy Land.

He would seem to me a somewhat one-sided minister who is more than a twelvemonth from any part of the book. Our fading impressions need a frequent renewal; and the warped coverlet of our own experience must be constantly stretched and fastened on the tenter-hooks of the whole compass of the Book.

Whatever excursions I may contemplate during the day in the great country, I would in the early morning move my tent leisurely along a beaten track which goes by spirals or cross-cuts through every part of the land.

It may seem a little mechanical to plod on, through the ritual of the Law and the chronologies of Chronicles, a chapter a day — but, remember, this is only one of our methods with the Bible — a necessary method, because otherwise we might lose the treasures in the unfrequented parts, a method, however, which needs to be constantly supplemented by other forms of approach; and then the discipline of this

conscientious regularity will be found to exercise its due effect; by this toil, as by all toil, we are liberated from the "weight of chance desires" and the peculiar oppression of "unchartered freedom." As brilliant intellectual qualities require a solid substratum of industry, or as the variations of a melody are built upon a steady ground-tone, so all our excursions in the study of the Bible are best undertaken from this starting-point of discipline.

4. The fourth method, indispensable for the preacher, is more arduous still. Every preacher should be, so far as circumstances permit, a scholar. The languages of the original Scriptures should be sufficiently mastered to enable him to move with some independence of judgment and selection through the works of even the greatest commentators or exegetes.

Nothing is more tedious to men than second-hand scholarship. The plums from the commentaries appear in a sermon as very dry raisins indeed, unless the preacher was in a position to use his authorities with a freshness which under favouring circumstances might have made him an authority himself.

I would not lay too much stress on this requirement. There is an idolatry of learning, an esoteric spirit of the specialist, a superstitious reverence for the "original tongues," which will ruin any preacher. I do not advocate the sentiment which was expressed by the father of Coleridge when he used to speak with bated breath of Hebrew as "the immediate language of the Holy Ghost." To my mind the old countrywoman was considerably nearer the mark when, on hearing a minister quote Greek in the pulpit, she exclaimed indignantly, "Bless you, you don't suppose the Apostle Paul knew Greek!" It is a far saner state of mind which supposes that Paul was ignorant of Greek, than that which imagines that a mysterious and Divine value attaches to the tongue in which, as it happened, the great communications of God were first made.

But the importance of a firm and scholarly hand in dealing with the exegesis of Scripture in public ministrations is so vast, and the mischief done by ignorant preachers is so incal-



culable and far-reaching, that I would use it as a plea to students to labour day and night in their period of preparation to become good Hebraists and good Hellenists, and to lay the foundations of a sensitive and resourceful scholarship. I would suggest that the crisis of intellectual curiosity and minute research should be got over safely and wholesomely before the active work of the ministry begins, so that no traces of the disease may be seen in the pulpit, but only the happy results of a favourable inoculation. A preacher's knowledge of the text, and his instinctive apprehension of linguistic colour and form, should be so deeply settled in his constitution by long and painful toil, that, while a Hebrew or Greek specialist in his congregation would immediately perceive that he was an adept, the poorest and least instructed of his hearers would never dream that he knew Hebrew or Greek at all, and indeed would never need to be reminded that the word of God ever came in any other language than good, racy, idiomatic English.

It is in this sense that careful work in philology and exegesis is the most self-denying of the preacher's many sacrifices to his mission. It makes no show, it wins no praise, it is taken for granted by careless listeners; the sweat of the brain which it demands is dropped in silence and darkness upon the ground where no human eye sees, and angels alone come to minister to him.

5. And yet I am not sure that the fifth method of Bible study does not make even greater demands upon the preacher, at any rate on the preacher of this singularly expansive and progressive period of the world's life. It is necessary for every true man and brave teacher to read his Bible carefully and constantly with the Aids to Criticism which modern research has furnished.

I shall avoid the term which has now passed into the language of cant, the Higher Criticism. I will only remind you that no field of knowledge has been more laboriously turned, or with more remarkable results, than that of the systematic inquiry into the composition,

the dates, the authorship, of the several books in the Canon of Scripture.

That the conclusions to which the trend of discovery points are in a sense revolutionary I will not attempt to deny. They who are unhappy enough so to have built the walls of their faith that it will be like a shock of earthquake to them to discover that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, or that the Book of Isaiah comprises many great prophetic utterances from other sources than Isaiah himself, must inevitably experience something like *vertigo* in exploring the carefully reasoned work of modern scholarship. Some preachers, and many editors, have ingloriously resolved to avoid the dizzy heights of Truth, to conceal themselves in the valley of Tradition, and to anathematise those who have too much confidence in God and the Bible to follow their example. I am not careful to minimise the temptation which thus comes to a preacher, even to one who is veritably sent by God. He often knows quite well that if he shuts his eyes to the facts, and

blindly clings to the old unquestioning dogmatism, he will not only escape the throes of new knowledge himself, but he will be praised by the multitudes who hide in the valley of Tradition, and even hailed as a champion if he launches his thunderbolts against the truths which he has never ventured even to examine. The Church swarms with people who have no spiritual sinew, and whose lungs cannot breathe the invigorating air of Truth: they take up the cry of that timid and decorous spinster who, on hearing an exposition of the Darwinian theory that men are descended from apes, said, "Let us hope it is not true, or if it is, *let us hush it up.*"

I count it to be the great trial and ordeal which God presents before His prophets in all ages — shall they sit easily in the slumberous bowers of an accepted Orthodoxy, or will they up and climb, and walk, even with Death and Morning, on the mountain horns?

I was myself nurtured in a university where ecclesiastical tradition held an undisputed sway, and the free air of truer thinking which

was abroad in Germany and even in Scotland was never for a moment admitted. And well do I remember in the early days of my ministry a young educated man coming to me at the close of a service, and eagerly putting to me the question, "Do you believe Moses wrote the Pentateuch?" And when I answered, "Yes," his countenance fell, and he went away, knowing that he could get no help in that quarter, for, indeed, he himself was a better scholar than the incapable preacher to whom he had listened. I would do anything in my power to save the coming "sons of the prophets" from being trained in the obscurantism, and the consequent blindness which prevailed in my own student days at Oxford.

6. But the most essential and, I think, the most delightful method of Bible reading is that which I reserve for the last—I mean the devotional. In Criticism as such no human soul can rest. When we have learnt all we can from it, we still have to go to the Bible as the pabulum for the soul's life, and

we ought to praise God that the work of Criticism has not diminished, and, we may confidently predict, never can diminish, the immediate spiritual value of the Scriptures, in guiding our feet into the ways of prayer, and feeding our spirits with the manna sent down from Heaven.

It would be well if all of us — and especially scholars — would remember what Spenser in his musical manner has taught us, that only Fidelity, or Faith, can make the Bible a living power for the reader. At her feet the Red Cross Knight was bound to sit,

And that her sacred book, with bloody writ,  
That none could read except she did them teach,  
She unto him disclosed every whit ;  
And heavenly documents thereout did preach,  
That weaker wit of man could never reach ;  
Of God ; of Grace ; of Justice ; of Freewill ;  
That wonder was to hear her goodly speech ;  
For she was able with her words to kill  
And raise again to life the heart that she did thrill.<sup>1</sup>

The supreme and incalculable value of this

<sup>1</sup> *Faerie Queene*, bk. i. canto x. stanza xix.

devotional use of the Bible will probably dawn upon us all more clearly by an example than by any vague and general insistence of mine.

The great missionary to Mongolia, James Gilmour, had to face that bitterest experience of the man of God, solitude and isolation in his work. For twenty-one years he spent a good part of the summer in the tents or inhospitable inns of that vast and unevangelised country. He had not to preach to cultivated congregations, or indeed to any congregations at all. But in hand-to-hand contact with the sordid, narrow, stupid life of the people, he had to manifest Christ, and to present to them in his person the truth which they could not understand in words. On that part of his life I wish to say more in a later lecture; but to-day I refer to him only to show how by the devotional study of the Psalms in a special degree he was maintained in his discouraging task.

“I am reading at night, before going to bed,” he says in his diary of October 25, 1886, “the Psalms in a small print copy of the Re-

vised Bible, holding it at arm's length almost, close up to a Chinese candle, to suit my eyes, for I cannot see small print well now, and I find much strength and courage in the old warrior's words. Verily the Psalms are inspired. No doubt about that. None that wait on Him will be put to shame. He is with me here."<sup>1</sup>

Or again, on July 30, 1890. "How full the Psalms are! These days I am going through them in Chinese; I take one each morning and commit some verses of it carefully. Then during the day, as time permits, I read a few more. How one the soul of man is! When dull and cold and dead, and feeling as if I could not pray, I turn to the Psalms. When most in the spirit the Psalms meet almost all the needs of expression. And yet deluded men talk of the Bible as the outcome of the Jewish mind! The greatest proof of the Divine source of the Book is that it fits the soul as well as a Chubb's key fits the lock it was

<sup>1</sup> *James Gilmour of Mongolia*, p. 205, by R. Lovett, M.A. R.T.S.



made for.”<sup>1</sup> And in another letter of the same time, “What helps me most just at present is the Psalms. . . . I never knew there was so much in them before. I believe that even at the end of a long life this (discovery of more and more in God’s Word) will hold true of all the Bible, and then for the beyond there is the Inexhaustible Himself — satisfaction for the present and plenty for the future.”<sup>2</sup>

And just a few months before he died he wrote to a brother missionary: “Sometimes it is cold and dark; but I just hold on, and it is all right. Romans viii. I find good reading in dull spiritual weather, and the Psalms too are useful. When I feel I cannot make headway in devotion I open in the Psalms, and push out in my canoe, and let myself be carried along in the stream of devotion which flows through the whole book. The current always sets towards God, and in most places is strong and deep. These old men — eh, man! — they beat

<sup>1</sup> *James Gilmour of Mongolia*, p. 272, by R. Lovett, M.A. R.T.S.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

us hollow, with all our New Testament and all our devotional aids and manuals. And yet I don't know. In the old time there were giants — one here and there. Now there are many nameless but efficient men of only ordinary stature.”<sup>1</sup>

And with these living words from a giant of the new time I must conclude, asking you, in a far more various and searching way than ever our fathers understood, to be constantly plying your canoe on that great tide which flows through all the Book we call the Bible, the current of which always sets towards God.

<sup>1</sup>*James Gilmour of Mongolia*, p. 281, by R. Lovett, M.A. R.T.S.

## LECTURE V.



## LECTURE V.

### THE WORD OF GOD OUTSIDE THE BIBLE.

IN the last Lecture we dwelt with some fullness of detail on the Word of God which men call the Bible, and we saw how necessary it is that a preacher, one who is to deliver the word of the Lord to his own age, should master the Word delivered to the past ages, and in many different ways seek to assimilate the whole of what is written. It might seem almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Bible or to attach an undue value to the Word of God which is for all time delivered by it. Yet even this apparent impossibility has been effected by the narrowness and ignorance of men. For it has sometimes been implied, or even expressly taught, not only that the Bible is the Word of God, but that it alone is God's

Word, as if He had not otherwise spoken to men, and while everything within the covers of the Canon is the word of God, nothing is the word of God which is not written there. It is needless to say that the Bible itself does not teach this one-sided doctrine. I am not sure that the Church ever taught it *ex cathedrâ*. It is a superstition that is born, like many other superstitions, of indolence. "If the Word of God"—so seems to argue the sluggish human mind—"is really to be found, whole and sole, in a small volume that I can put into my pocket and regard as a complete *Vade Mccum*, then I shall do well. I need not trouble to study anything else.<sup>1</sup> The strenuous and often agonised experiences by which holy men of old received the Word were

<sup>1</sup> "The famous barbarism of Omar in burning the library of Alexandria, on the ground that if it contained anything other than the Koran it was superfluous, finds a close parallel in the burning of the Library of Tripoli by the Christians in 1104. Ibn Abu Tai says that there were three million volumes; that is no doubt an exaggeration, but a vast treasure of literature was lost because a priest declared it contained only the impious books of Mohammed." (*Picturesque Palestine*, vol. iii. p. 14. Virtue & Co.)

vicarious, they were meant to spare me labour and sorrow. Many centuries ago the Inspired Writers — ‘sacred penmen’ they have been called — through travail and pain, through watching and waiting and prayer, received the whole and the final counsel of God, and wrote it in a book, which I can purchase for a few coppers. I need not distress myself to approach the sacred mount myself, or to penetrate the veil before the Holy of Holies. No need for me to go away into Arabia, or in the persecuted solitude of Patmos to hear the voice like the sound of many waters.”

It is painful to be obliged to confess that the shallow doctrine of Scripture which Protestantism has hugged for two centuries or more is simply the product of indolence and unbelief. And it is doubtless very painful to those who have rested content with it to find that it all crumbles away directly any one rises out of the slumber of dogmatism and ventures to put a direct question: “What proof is there, in the Bible or out of it, that the word of God is in any sense confined within the Bible itself?”

Now, in opposition to what is after all a baseless dogma, the man who is bent on receiving the word of God whencesoever and howsoever it may come to him, will feel compelled to work along several lines of inquiry and reflection. *First*, there is nothing to show that God has not been speaking to His saints, His prophets, His preachers since the first century, in the same way that He spoke to men of old, and that in their writings there are not precious words of God which every man of God would wish to receive and to obey. *Secondly*, there is much ground for thinking that in other religions besides Christianity and in other sacred literatures besides the Bible, He who has never left Himself anywhere without a witness has spoken with a fulness and a richness which will greatly enlarge our conception of the God who is the Father of every family that is named in heaven and earth. *Thirdly*, seeing that mankind is His offspring, and in Him we all live and move and have our being, it is fair to assume that in the very constitution of our minds there is a latent word of God, and in the



general history of man on the earth there is a progressively revealed purpose of God, so that in all true literature, whether philosophy or poetry or history, the spiritually enlightened mind will be able to detect manifold words of God. *Fourthly*, the universe itself, and the very framework of Nature, if we are right in regarding it all as the creation of the Divine mind, must deserve the closest study, and must reveal His thought, and, in certain conditions, His articulate Word. And *lastly*, when these many other sources of revelation have been struck, and the mind has been widened to an apprehension of the manifold ways of God's self-manifestation, we may certainly expect that the repeated and more intelligent re-perusal of the Bible, or the Word of God *par excellence*, will result in new understanding, so that, according to John Robinson's famous idea, "more light and truth will break forth from the Written Word."

Or, to put it briefly, if we would receive the Word of God in its fulness, we must consider and receive (1) the lives and the teaching of

inspired men all down the ages, (2) the truths of Comparative Religion, (3) the true results of literature, (4) the true results of Science, and (5) the deeper and wider teaching which comes from the Bible itself to one who is versed in these several studies.

The Bible is all-important, but it is not all that is important. It is regulative of all study, but it does not take the place of all study. It must be understood, but its very greatness demands that all means of understanding it should be freely used. It is a Revelation of God, the greatest, the clearest, the most complete that the world possesses, but it is one function of its Divine teaching to open our eyes to other revelations of Him which are outside itself. It is not a Koran, which, professing to render all other means of knowledge superfluous, falls like a blight, wherever it is accepted, on science and literature and progress. But it is, as it were, a great and indispensable Primer to the human spirit, for receiving and understanding the whole counsel of Him who reveals Himself in many ways.

Before, then, we approach the central idea, viz., the preacher receiving the Word of God immediately from the Divine Spirit in order to deliver it to the world, we must complete our *propædutic* by adding to the requirements of Bible study the other lines of thought which must complete the sum of the Revelation hitherto given, or now being given, to mankind. For in a much larger sense than a cramped Bibliolatry has permitted most of us to see, “every writing God-inspired is also useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for the discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, for every good work furnished completely” (2 Tim. iii. 16).

Now to pass in review the five points which have been mentioned. 1. There is, I believe, no conceivable authority for saying that the deliverance of inspired or prophetic messages to men came to an abrupt end when the Canon of the New Testament was completed. The *Apostolic* utterances had come to an end; the men who had been contemporaries of the Lord Jesus had passed away; and there was

every reason for carefully gathering together and preserving as a priceless treasure all these testimonies from the circle of those who "had seen the Lord." But neither the apostles themselves nor their Lord gave a hint that the direct communication of the Spirit of God with believing men was thenceforward to cease. Rather they gave many express declarations to the contrary. It is true that the sub-apostolic literature is of very inferior value to the apostolic writings themselves, and for that very reason Barnabas, Hermas, Clement, and Ignatius, though of the same date as the later New Testament writings, did not obtain a place in the New Testament Canon. But stepping onward in the bold march of Christian life and thought, we must indeed be insensible to the very meaning of the Word of God if we cannot detect the Divine teaching in many parts of Origen, Irenæus, and Tertullian. Certainly that operation of the Spirit on the human mind which is called inspiration had not ceased in the days of Athanasius and of Augustine. And notwithstanding the corrup-

tions of the Church, and the constant tendency to silence the prophets at the fanes of the priests, the word of God has come to His chosen age after age with a directness and power which were hardly surpassed in apostolic times. If the *Imitatio Christi* is not a word of God, what is? Is the sacred passion of St. Bernard, which still breathes in his hymns of fervent love to Jesus, translated into every modern language, less of a word from God than the song of Deborah or Psalm lviii.? Did Luther break the yoke of Rome, create Germany, and shake the world without an immediate word of God? Was Wesley a man only of traditions and erudition, and did he not receive a message which lives for ever in his incomparable writings? And in our own century have no new and clear truths been communicated by God to Frederick Denison Maurice, F. W. Robertson, Macleod Campbell, Thomas Erskine, Horace Bushnell? They were persecuted and misunderstood, as they to whom the word of the Lord comes are in all ages, but already we begin to perceive that

inspired men have been among us, and to acknowledge, as the men of Josiah's time acknowledged concerning their ancient faith, "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deut. v. 3). Our study of theology, in a sentence, should be, as the term itself implies, a study of the God-word that came in Biblical times, supplemented and completed by the God-word which has been coming ever since. As one of your own poets has said: —

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,  
And not on paper leaves or leaves of stone ;  
Each age, each kindred adds a verse to it,  
Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan,  
While swings the sea, while mists the mountains shroud,  
While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,  
Still at the prophet's feet the nations sit.<sup>1</sup>

2. But this large saying of James Russell Lowell's takes us over to a second point. One of the greatest truths which has dawned upon our spacious century has been the recognition of God's Spirit in the lower religions of the

<sup>1</sup> James Russell Lowell.

world. It was an idea by no means strange to the thinkers of the second and third centuries, to Justin Martyr and the school of Alexandria; but the intolerable pollutions of the old Paganism in its decay carried the Church as a whole to the less luminous view that all mankind, outside the circle of Judaism and Christianity, was given up to devil-worship, and that the witness of God to Himself, which it was admitted existed everywhere in primitive times, had been lost. The study of comparative religions, which was rendered possible by the study of comparative philology and ethnology, has very much modified that rather contracted view. The Egyptian hieroglyphics have revealed that the dwellers by the Nile, four thousand years before Christ, sang hymns to God which we might use to-day. The labours of Sir William Jones and his successors threw open to Western minds — and even to Eastern — the early faith of the Vedas. The work of missionaries in China revealed the noble conceptions of Confucius and Menzius. A sympathetic study of Buddhism showed how God

could live and work in a system professedly atheistic. The reading of the Zendavesta has assured us of a pure and simple faith in ancient Persia which is greatly in advance of the more corrupted forms of Christianity. Meanwhile the records of the buried cities of Mesopotamia have come to light, and proved that many truths and religious ideas which we supposed were the peculiar property of God's chosen people were familiar to the kindred nations whom we regarded as not chosen. And even the savage and barbarous races, which, according to John Locke, showed no trace of a faith in God, have been found on closer acquaintance to retain the distinct marks of that witness which God has given to Himself in every nation and tribe of mankind.

Now it may be granted that whatever is true in these other religions is found in Christianity, and for the most part what is found in them and not in Christianity is distorted, corrupt, or untrue. But none the less, if we would rightly apprehend the Word of God in its breadth of significance, we must recognise this



manifoldness in the gradations of His self-revelation, and freely admit that our own faith differs from other religions, not in this respect, that it is from God and they are not from Him, but rather in the supreme importance of the fact which is the key to all religions, the person of Jesus Christ, prepared in history and prophecy, revealed in due time, and received now into the Unseen as a perennial fountain of grace and power and salvation to mankind. All the religions were, as Schiller taught, hints, suggestions, anticipations, aspirations, which looked towards Christ. The wise men of the East came to His cradle, and the wise men of the West started from His Cross. But never do we rightly appreciate the Being who is Himself the Word of God, until we make out the scattered syllables and letters which in all the faiths of the world have waited to be combined in that Name which is above every name.

No preacher can train the home church or equip the missionary church who has not recognised this wider meaning of the Word of God in the manifold religions of mankind.

3. But, difficult as the idea just presented is to work out in detail, the idea that follows on it presents still greater difficulties, and yet it must be fairly faced by a true man of God. The whole word of the Lord will not be obtained from the avowed utterances of religion, even if we give to religion the broadest conceivable meaning. Not without reason does the Bible contain a great deal of history and biography, of poetry, and even, according to Hebrew conceptions, of philosophy. The truth is that all human life from the beginning, and the human mind itself, with its characteristic powers of thought and utterance, especially in those noblest efforts of utterance which are called poetry, and those completest efforts of thought which are called philosophy, contain certain words of God, certain indubitable revelations which it is our duty to receive. Literature is the record of these truths. Now I think we are very liable to be misled by the opinion of certain great and successful men of God, who in the stress of practical work are apt to underrate the value of a liberal

education. John Wesley, for example, when he wrote his little work on Entire Sanctification, described himself as *homo unius libri*. He was a man of one book, and that book the Bible. One is apt to hastily conclude that therefore a man will be thoroughly equipped for the work of God if he reads no book but the Bible. But whatever was Wesley's practice at that time, he had certainly been a man of many books. Few modern sermons contain so many quotations from ancient literature, or so many allusions to the literature of all ages, as his. Again, Coleridge might say, speaking of the Bible, "In this Book there is more that *finds* me than I have experienced in all other books put together." But because, if we were confined to one book, we should all unhesitatingly choose the Bible as the one, we are not thereby confined to the Bible. And while men, like Bunyan, who had small access to books, have built a style, and a literature, and a religion, and a faith on the Bible alone, it is noticeable that men who, having the opportunity of a wider culture, from some mistaken

notion of piety resolve to read nothing but the Bible, become narrow and impracticable, insusceptible of new truths, and, in due time, incapable of understanding the old. They are like one who has drawn down the blinds of his house on every side except the east, and therefore misses the glory of noonday and the purple splendours of the sunset.

All the great poets, from Homer and Hesiod down to Browning and Walt Whitman, utter in the stress of their poetic afflatus truths and feelings which we can only explain by attributing them to God Himself. Even those who have stained their white singing robes and thrown their heavenly laurel crown in the dust, if they are real poets, will utter things which are as truly from God as the words of Balaam or the words of the faithless prophet that spoke against the altar at Bethel. Goethe as a man seems more Hellenic than Christian, but Goethe as a poet has said things which we can only gratefully acknowledge come from God. To discriminate and distinguish may be difficult; it certainly demands a purified heart and a true

Christian sensibility. But he who would speak God's word to his own generation should know the poets of all generations, and sit at their feet, subject always to his Master's control.

And that department of mental activity which is called Philosophy, whether the *Critique of the Pure Reason*, or the Empiricism of Inductive Methods, whether simply metaphysical, or ethical and practical, is charged with primitive and continuous revelations of God. It should not be left to those who believe only in Natural Religion and deny revelation, to Theists or Unitarians, — nobly as they have often done the work, — to bring out the great fundamental truths of God and the Soul and the World, which are given in the acts of cognition and volition, and are brought into startling and convincing clearness by the existence and the verdicts of the Moral Sense. It is true that the Bible does not contain a system of philosophy, or approach the question of religion from the purely philosophical standpoint; but the reason of this is that it assumes throughout that human nature as such is Thought, and

that in Thought is contained that proof of God and the Soul which is the necessary presupposition of all religion.

It is perhaps needless to say that the view I am now advocating is not that a preacher should be familiar with all the various schools and systems of philosophy, but that every man of God must be awake to the message of God which is given to us in consciousness directly we come to reflect, and is interpreted with more or less exactness by the great thinkers or philosophers.

4. The vehicle of the Word which we have just examined is sufficiently large and various : but that to which we now pass makes even more demands upon our attention and effort. Indeed, except in a limited and almost conventional sense, religious people scarcely admit that God is speaking to man in the visible universe and in the order of nature. We are tempted to look askance at Physical Science, forgetting that it is the careful and co-ordinated observation of things which must be the expression of the mind of God. We dread Material-

ism, not knowing that it is simply a stepping-stone into the audience chamber of God; a stone on which materialists are apt unnecessarily to linger, but which we may and ought to use in our swift and eager ascent to Him. Again, that unscientific appreciation of Nature which results from brooding with thoughtful and tender insight upon its changing aspects until it seems to be, in the words of the chief hierophant of that cult —

a mighty Being awake  
That does with its eternal music make  
A noise like thunder everlastingly, —

is sometimes regarded with suspicion as a kind of Pantheism. Our orthodox Theology and our Homiletics of the Schools do not as a rule take into account that the truth and beauty of things are words of God which must be read and interpreted by the man of God. And owing to this limitation Science and Poetry are too frequently found at variance with Theology, pursuing a course of their own.

Strange to say, this narrowness of conception which is supposed to be in the interests of the Bible as the Word of God is singularly un-Biblical. The Bible begins with a Poem of Creation, which, enumerating the several orders of existence as they were known at the time, sees in all the variety and perfection of the Cosmos a manifestation of the Creator who called it into being. The poet who composed the Book of Job had meditated upon the phenomena of Nature, and especially the majesty and strength of the larger mammals, until he seemed to hear the very voice of the Almighty chanting the psalm of the earth and its teeming life. Poet as he was, he drew his inspiration, not from the Law and the Prophets, but from Nature and human experience. And St. Paul, you will remember, launching out upon his most elaborate Theological Essay, the Epistle to the Romans, pauses to observe that distinct word of God in Nature which renders all men without excuse in their ignorance and vice, "for the unseen things of Him from the founding of



the Cosmos mentally apprehended in His handiwork are practically *seen* — both His invisible power and divinity.”

If, then, we would follow the teaching of the Bible we must expect a word of God to come to us outside the Bible, from nature and the order of created things. Science is a word of God, and the poetic and rapturous perception of beauty in the universe is a word of God. They who shut their minds against proved facts of science are closing their ears to the voice of God, and when they do it in the interests of what they would call *The Word of God* they are adding blasphemy to ignorance, and are numbered among the false prophets. The supreme value of the first chapter of Genesis is that it is quite sincere. Science was in a very elementary stage, but the Seer gave his message, using the best sources of information he possessed. But when a modern teacher chooses to ignore the patient toil and true discoveries of geologists and physiologists, and will have it that God had told mankind all He meant them to know about the Crea-

tion two thousand years before the dawn of a scientific epoch, that teaching has become an insincerity. It is intended to honour the Bible, but being a dishonour to Truth it ultimately brings discredit on the Book which is above all others a book of Truth.

I have nothing to say here about the speculations of Darwin and Haeckel and Huxley. As thinkers and philosophers these great scientists may have very little that is final to say; but as observers and recorders of the facts of the universe they and all other honest workers in the realm of physical science are spelling out for us the words of God. They may be working in the freedom of sonship and rejoicing in the handiwork of their Father, or they may be working as mere task-slaves under the whip of destiny, bringing their tale of facts without love or reverence or light; but the facts they report, when verified and proved, are Divine. The man of God receives them. In this sense Christianity should make use of Materialism.

It should also make use of Pantheism — or

rather assert the rights of a Christian Pantheism. For undoubtedly the world is palpitating with the message of God if only we had pure hearts and reverent minds to receive it. As one who might be called a Christian Pantheist said —

The word by seers and sibyls told  
In groves of oak or fanes of gold  
Still floats upon the morning wind,  
Still whispers to the willing mind.

Will you let me read—in place of further comment on this point—a transcript from a note-book written one September morning on a flat and featureless shore at the mouth of the Mersey? “A day of singular beauty; the *ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα*, not *ποντίων κυμάτων*, but *γαληνῆς*, more beautiful than I ever noticed it, and in the clear air Southport, eight miles away across the waters, looks close at hand, the faint line of hills behind it exquisitely soft. Surely in such a day God becomes almost apprehensible, and one wonders at the wealth of His manifestations and at the insensibility of men who do not perceive Him. Will all the

unobserved loveliness of His creation rise up in judgment against us one day, rebuking us that we did not perceive and know Him in signs so clear to understanding eyes and so moving to sensitive hearts? Were we ready and in tune perhaps He would press in upon us at every point and every day."

Certainly it is impossible to count any man of God adequately equipped to speak the Word of God to *the modern mind* whose whole culture and spiritual appreciation are pre-scientific, and, if it is lawful to describe a mental state by a typical man, pre-Wordsworthian. He may give an authentic word of God, so far as it goes, with a blindness to natural beauty as complete as St. Paul's or St. Bernard's, and with an ignorance of scientific results as unbroken as St. John's or St. Francis of Assisi's; but to minds that are saturated with the truths which God has manifested in these later times he will seem distant, unreal, and unconvincing. Not, of course, because he is not right in the word which he has delivered, but because he is deaf to other words which God has been speak-

ing. “It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was—that He speaketh, not spoke.” And if the teacher is ignorant of God’s more recent utterances the world will not unnaturally suppose that his authority on the more ancient utterances is open to question.

And this brings us to the last point in the present lecture.

5. “The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His written Word,” said John Robinson, the pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers. On a recent memorable occasion a distinguished Puritan minister of the United States argued before a large London assembly of the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers, that John Robinson meant by the famous *dictum* that God’s revelation, and the progress of His purpose, were to be sought exclusively in the Canon of Sacred Scripture. If that was really the meaning of John Robinson it would only illustrate the truth which Macaulay used to emphasise, that the greatest minds are not able to bind the future in all things because

they were pioneers in one thing: "progress goes on, till schoolboys laugh at the jargon which imposed on Bacon, till country rectors condemn the illiberality and intolerance of Sir Thomas More." But even in the limited meaning of the words which Dr. Goodwin attached to them there is a truth which we must carefully observe.

The Bible itself is in so unique and peculiar a sense the Word of God that just in proportion as we receive a veritable word from God in other directions we return to the Bible to find the message there more luminous, more harmonious, more Divine. "Light and truth break out" of familiar passages so that we wonder why we never read them in that way before.

The course of Church history, for example, and the writings of great Church fathers from the beginning until now are a noble and living commentary upon the Sacred Text. Each passage becomes like a house hung with the spoils of the conquered and the votive offerings of conquerors; and as we attach to the

familiar words the deeds which they have wrought in the spiritual conflict, we penetrate their meaning and appreciate their potency with a growing surprise.

Or, to take another example, never did we understand the grandeur and simplicity of the primitive world-history contained in the opening chapters of Genesis until the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions and the discovery of the Library of Assurbanipal enabled us to set the narrative side by side with the Chaldean records. New light and truth, indeed, broke out from the Creation-poem and the story of Eden and the account of the Flood, when the comparison revealed how a firm monotheism and a devout faith in the living God could read a Divine significance in the earliest traditions of man. The *Book of the Dead*, or the Rig-veda, or the Zend-avesta, forms an admirable foil to set off the incomparable value of Bible teaching, and if it enlarges our thought of God to find that He has shown light and truth to other peoples also, it still more enlarges our thought of the Bible to find

how much more light and truth were shown to that chosen people with whom God has dealt as with no other, and how perfectly the broken lights and scattered truths are gathered up and presented in the Person of the Incarnate Word.

The same remark may be made about History, Literature, Philosophy, Art, Science, Poetry. It is not only obscurantism, but it is a folly and impiety to reject the singular services which all these vehicles of truth render to the written Word in bringing out from it more light and truth. The critical study of history is a very modern science, but it is not too much to say that Bible history has acquired a new value and a new certainty since it was subjected to the tests of historical criticism. Something has been lost, something has been gained; but what has been lost is merely fiction, what has been gained is truth. Our children will read the history of Israel and the priceless memoirs of the Evangelists with new eyes, with firmer faith, with deeper love. The whole method of what is called the



Higher Criticism is strictly a light and a truth which has broken out from the Bible itself. It was the closer and more careful study of the original documents which led to the recasting and rearrangement of the Biblical literature. The philosophers have all contributed something, from the Schoolmen down to the Hegelians, towards a deeper apprehension of Bible thought. The Art of Christendom began in an attempt to illustrate the Bible, and in proportion to its real greatness and permanency has been its power of interpreting the truths of the Bible. Science has not been recognised as an ally of Revelation, neither were the prophets, nor even Christ and His apostles, at first. But the enlarged universe which Science has shown us will not result in dwarfing the spiritual things which are essentially infinite. And Poetry beyond all question has revealed the meaning of the written Word again and again where theologians have failed. Spenser is like a soft summer sunshine shed over the whole range of Biblical thought. Milton is like a planet

that shines in the unexplored vault of the Book. Cowper is like the shaded lamp which sheds its radiance on the open page. Wordsworth is the clear light of the dawn that prepares for the rising of the sun. Longfellow and Whittier, Browning and Tennyson, are indispensable companions for the modern mind in ranging through the circles of the Bible.

If any justification were needed for listening diligently to the voice of God which sounds outside of the Bible it might be found in this, that penetrated with those more varied, vague, and vagrant words of God which are in our ears on every hand, we return to the Book to find indeed that "God has more light and truth to break forth from His written Word."

## LECTURE VI.



## LECTURE VI.

### ON RECEIVING THE WORD.

THE subject of the lecture to-day is one which may well make the lecturer put his hand on his mouth, and hush him into the silence of contrition and self-condemnation. I have to speak to you of the way, or the ways, in which the preacher is now, and always, to receive the Word of God in order to deliver it to the people. It is a hard task to hold up a lantern to illumine the path for others, when the light exposes the manifold defects of the bearer.

It will be a relief and a help to put in the forefront of what has now to be said the example of a great preacher who has long ago passed away. We are told in the life of Samuel Rutherford, one of the most immediately inspired

men in that period of inspiration, the time of the Covenant and of the Confession, — the mid-seventeenth century, — that during his ministry at Anwoth it was his custom to spend hours at a time in a little wood near the manse, seeking and undoubtedly enjoying a direct communication with Christ. He would pace up and down in the exercise of prayer; he would wrestle and toil until the heavy veil grew thin — and the Person of his Lord was manifestly before him. The consequence was that when he appeared in the pulpit on Sundays the people were overawed with the sense of Christ being in the preacher. It was Christ's face they saw beaming on them in the face of their pastor, and his tones thrilled with the power of the voice which once spoke on earth as never man spake. Not only the little parish of Anwoth on the Solway Firth, but the whole county of Galloway, was moved by this man's ministry. People came from afar, ostensibly to hear Rutherford, really to see Jesus. I am not able to say whether this Scotch divine was a man of natural eloquence — all that has come

down to us from him is already so saturated with this Christly communion that it is not possible to discriminate surely, or to mark precisely, where Rutherford ceases and Christ begins. But one cannot help feeling that the effects produced by his ministry were decidedly independent of eloquence. Indeed, eloquence is a gift which the Lord does not often use much for His purposes—it is a prancing palfrey which the Son of Man rarely rides. Moses was not eloquent, Aaron was. The word of the Lord came constantly to Moses. Aaron had gifts of speech, but he made a golden calf. Jeremiah was not eloquent—his opponents apparently were. Jeremiah stands on the summit of prophetic work, and the wordy men who gained the popular ear in his day are pilloried in the history of the kingdom of God as deceivers. Paul was not eloquent, so he tells us—Apollos was, and mighty in the Scriptures too. Yet we gather that Paul, with his poor presence, his involved periods, his arguments like the fiery grinding of a wheel on granite, received and delivered more of the word of the Lord

than Apollos. It would be dangerous to take illustrations nearer at hand. And it is enough simply to say that natural eloquence may easily be a snare to a preacher. Words may come so abundantly that he will not wait to hear the word of the Lord. To obtain the copious flow of ideas and images and feelings may be so easy to him that he will not take the trouble to traverse the barren wastes which lie between him and the Mount of God, or to climb the dizzy path to the gloomy cavern where the still small voice is heard. If, of course, he does not shrink from the toilsome conditions and does actually receive the Word, his eloquence may stand him in good stead. Eloquence is useful if the Word is there, but it must not be mistaken for the Word.

Now what are the ways of receiving the Word — nay, what is the threefold way of receiving it? for there are not many ways, but one. How easily we can all answer the question — how hardly can we put in practice our answer! The threefold way of receiving the word of the Lord is study, meditation, prayer — prayerful



study, studious meditation, meditative prayer, and again, as the girdle that binds on all pieces of the armour, prayer, long, secret pleadings, passionate and definite requests, firm and believing grasps of the handle which prayer presents.

I almost hesitate to speak of these ways in succession lest they should seem to be divided, yet I must needs speak of each separately, for the triple way demands all three.

The first, however, will not require a very prolonged consideration, for all the previous lectures have led up to it and shown the necessity for it. And yet the place of study in receiving the word of the Lord requires a special emphasis in that view of preaching which is now occupying our attention.

1. *Study.* Much was said about Bible study in the Fourth Lecture, and some hints were thrown out in the last Lecture about detecting the Word of God through other fields of study. But it is impossible to overstate the certainty that apart from earnest study of the facts around us, the signs of the times, the move-

ments of thought, the trend of development, it is impossible for any man to read aright the Word of the Lord as it comes to his own generation. The prophets of Israel were like the eye and the ear and the tongue of the people to which they belonged, and on that account saw, heard, and delivered the message of the Lord. They were intimately acquainted with the social conditions of their day — they were keenly alive to the political movements of the time — the religion in which their spirits were imbued was above everything a practical religion. Amos was a social reformer, and repudiated the title of prophet. Micah was a moralist, who could see no meaning in religion except goodness. Isaiah was a statesman rather than a preacher. Jeremiah spent his life in a sphere of activity to which the nearest modern parallels would be the career of Guiseppe Mazzini, or that of Louis Kossuth. What the prophets saw of Divine Truth was all presented in the colour and the conditions of their own day — the kingdom of God was in the heavens just beyond their horizon, but in

looking to it and for it their vision was occupied with what was near at hand to them. The difference between a false and a true prophet was often that the one was too unobservant to read the times in which he lived, and the other was *a student*. As Schultz says, following Duhm, looking at the matter in a purely historical way we cannot question that those who have come down to us as false prophets, *e.g.*, the opponents of Jeremiah, were often personally quite convinced all along that they were uttering the will of God, though they were influenced by one-sided truths, or by conceptions which under changed circumstances had ceased to correspond to the view of God.<sup>1</sup> It is a solemn reflection. There have of course always been prophets who, according to Amaziah's scornful judgment, preach in order to earn their bread.<sup>2</sup> But there are preachers who are entirely above these mercenary considerations, men sincere and open as the day, men wishing to be true and to defend the truth, who are yet false prophets through

<sup>1</sup> *Offenbarungsreligion*, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Amos vii. 12.

ignorance. 'They will not take the trouble to master the truths which God has put before them: they blindly denounce as secular the revelation of God, because it happens to be made in their own time; they make it a point of duty to keep outside the national, the social, the political life, in which their lot has been cast.

I remember once being sorely perplexed by a man in our own country who seemed thoroughly earnest and devout, and exercised, on that account, a wide influence over minds of a certain order. But in his advocacy of truth he was violent, unjust, ill-mannered, ignorant. His writings were like oil of vitriol, and it was difficult to imagine how he could be speaking in the name of Jesus. Here evidently was what every one was bound to recognise as a true man and yet a false prophet. My perplexity was removed when I made the accidental discovery that he had conscientiously for many years refrained from reading any book besides the Bible. That of course meant to say that he would have been a true

prophet if he had been living in the time of Moses, or in the days of the Maccabees, or even at the close of the first century of our era, but through ignoring all the truth which God has been displaying to the world through these eighteen centuries, and through obstinately hardening his heart against the facts which are open to all careful inquirers to-day he had become a false prophet.

The word of God, as we see in the Bible, always plays like a lambent flame about the facts which are known at the time. On minds which still had the primitive idea of creation described in the Priestly Code it came with revealing power, and brought out the deep religious meaning of creation. But if the word of God is to come upon us with like power we must master the facts concerning the process of creation which a century of patient and reverent investigation has collected. To men who had in their hands the early traditions, and the historiographical records of their nation, the Word of God came enabling them to write spiritually and didactically the history

of Israel : but if the Word of God is to come to us in the same manner we must not only accept the light of historical science on this history of Israel, but we must acquaint ourselves with the history of other nations, and especially of our own. The history of the Anglo-Saxon race is as divine as the history of the Hebrew race ; and one reason why modern preachers are comparatively powerless in affecting their contemporaries, is that they are not, like Hebrew prophets, patriots with a deep and divine love of their country, and a firm and vital conviction that God is controlling its affairs and developing its growth.

It is not possible to decide what departments of knowledge must be studied by the preacher. Indeed since no man can study everything, each must follow the line of his own bent and capacity. One preacher may be specially a student of science, another of history, another of philosophy, another of literature. Here and there a man may have grace to be a student of theology without being spoiled as a preacher. The lines of thought

and work are various, but the point to be enforced is that real study should be bestowed on whichever line is selected. Desultory reading is the bane of preachers, followed by a rapid decline into anecdotage. In other departments of activity every one sees the necessity of close and connected application, of mental toil which is not relaxed for convenience or for comfort or for pleasure. Too often the man of God becomes indolent and intellectually self-indulgent. He ceases to work hard at things. His eye ranges leisurely over anything or everything. He makes newspapers and magazines the staple of his self-discipline, and even with his Bible he follows ingloriously any commentator who may be at hand.

But if a man expects to hear God speaking in this day and generation he must be alert and active. Every faculty must be used. No opportunity must be missed. He, more than most, must know "something of all things and all of something." For mental discipline he must have his special subject at which he con-

scientiously labours. For variety and completeness he must bring his practised powers to range over other subjects as occasion offers. The man who speaks for God must be *educated* thoroughly, not necessarily in the collegiate sense, but in the sense that all his faculties are in full activity — observation, reasoning, memory, imagination, exercised and trained.

When God wishes to play upon an instrument and give a high music to men, He does not want to find that the best stops are out of use, and that the swell organ and the pedals were never finished.

II. But I turn quickly now to the second strand in the triple means of receiving the Word, less observed and therefore more requiring comment — *Meditation*.

There is a passage in the *Faerie Queene* which, like a great deal else that Spenser wrote, puts into the form and colour of allegory a deep spiritual truth. It is in the description of the House of Holiness (bk. i. c. x. 47), where the Red Cross knight is taken to visit the holy man



That day and night said his devotion,  
No other worldly business did apply ;  
His name was heavenly Contemplation ;  
Of God and goodness was his meditation.

Great grace that old man to him given had ;  
For God he often saw from Heaven's height :  
All were his earthly eyes both blunt and bad,  
And through great age had lost their kindly sight,  
Yet wondrous quick and persaunt was his spright  
As eagle's eye that can behold the sun.

The knight with his guide questions him a  
little, and then he is led by Contemplation to  
a hill-top.

From thence, far off he unto him did show  
A little path that was both steep and long,  
Which to a goodly City led his view,  
Whose walls and towers were builded high and strong  
Of pearl and precious stone that earthly tongue  
Cannot describe, nor wit of man can tell ;  
Too high a ditty for my simple song.  
The city of the Great King hight it well,  
Wherein eternal peace and happiness doth dwell.

If study is the contemplation of visible things,  
then meditation is the study of things unseen ;  
and while much of the Word of God can come

to us in the facts which appeal to the senses, when they are rightly interpreted by the Spirit, the Word of God in its fulness does not, and cannot, come through the senses — “eye does not see, ear does not hear, the heart does not conceive.” Unless the man of God has got access within the veil, unless he is accustomed to handle things unseen, unless his inward eye is occupied with the immediate revelation of God, unless the communications of God come to him in an immediate and authentic way, he will never be able to show to men

The little path that is both steep and long,  
which leads upward to the Spiritual City.

Habits of meditation are not easily formed. A certain strength and agility of soul are demanded for it. Not without reason did the great seer, Michael Angelo, paint the prophets in heroic mould with tough sinews and massive brows. They must be athletes — and in good training too — that would tread the path of meditation. On the one hand, it

is comparatively easy to study and to reason ; on the other hand, it is far too easy to wander in the idle ways of listless reverie. But meditation is very far removed from both these analogous processes. It differs from study because it does not demand books or materials gathered in the realm of outward things, nor does it employ the familiar methods of ratiocination. It differs from reverie because it is not passive, but active, it does not follow the path of least resistance in the trooping and swaying imaginations of the heart, but rather it faces all obstacles and presses consciously to a goal.

Meditation is the steadfast setting of the mind on things unseen and eternal, on God and the soul, on the authority and dictates of the moral law, on life, not as it is broken in the kaleidoscope of experience, but as it is apprehended in the white light of its idea. No one is likely to enter the path of meditation and to quiet his breast for the task of reception unless he believes that there is an overarching Being that waits to impress itself

upon the prepared spirit, that there is a God who draws nigh to them that draw nigh unto Him. As a rule men have not faith enough *to meditate*. They have just faith enough to study, to acquire knowledge, to accumulate facts, and from a wide induction to make a venturesome guess at the origin or author of things. But it is a deeper and rare faith to be well persuaded that the Author of things is not far from the conscious mind, and watches for the ruffled waters to be still that He may mirror Himself in their bosom and send the gleam of His glory along their shining surface.<sup>1</sup> It is in this meditation that a believing soul may feel —

A presence that disturbs him with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime

<sup>1</sup> God, the only good of all intelligent natures, is not an absent or a distant God, but is more present in and to our souls than our own bodies : and we are strangers to heaven and without God in the world, for this only reason, because we are void of that spirit of prayer which alone can unite, and never fails to unite, us with the one only Good, and to open heaven and the kingdom of God within us." (William Law, *The Spirit of Prayer*, at the beginning.)

Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

It must have often struck you that there is a special facility for the difficult task of meditation in the night-watches.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is not far to seek. We suffer much from the distraction of the senses. Considering what we are, and whence, "the world is too much with us late and soon." The pageant of life rolls past us too ceaselessly, and though to a wise eye it is somewhat full of vain repetition, and too tawdry and tinselled to bear close inspection, the eye is occupied with it, constantly occupied, and remains occupied when the heart has grown sick of it and the mind cynical about it. It is with an effort that most men avert their eyes from the show even for a moment. The divine meaning of night is that

<sup>1</sup> Psa. lxiii. 6.

the show is shrouded, and the eyes are carried into far distances, and settled on the quiet lights in the infinite abysses. The spirit needs meditation as day needs the night.

An artist friend of mine, a painter of birds, who lives in London, tells me that sometimes of a night, when

The very houses seem asleep,  
And all that mighty heart is lying still,

he will hear far overhead the strange cries of wild-ducks, or of birds of passage, that are passing melodious over the unconscious city.

And so I imagine there are many voices, many movements of sphere-music, many high and great truths, many solemn arguments of the spirit, to which busy men are quite insensible. And unless the seer will quiet his spirit and listen on behalf of his busier fellows those upper melodies will remain unknown.

A man must walk as seeing Him that is invisible if he is to show God to men. He must speak as hearing words that are inaudible if he is to give God's messages to men. Most

people are well content with echoes, he must have the Voice. The hirelings about the house of God will be satisfied with recitations of past visions and the droning of things which others heard. The true prophet will hear for himself, or not speak. Now and again, through indolence or forgetfulness, he will, like Nathan, speak his own word and encourage men in a forbidden path by some pseudo-divine approbation, "The Lord is with you." But in the night of meditation he will recover himself and will hear the word of the Lord coming to reverse his merely human judgment.<sup>1</sup> He will learn in time to distinguish very keenly and severely between the ordinary movements of his own fallible mind and the communications which he receives from on high as one

Which heareth the words of God,  
Which seeth the vision of the Almighty,  
Falling down and having his eyes open.<sup>2</sup>

There is a deeply significant truth written large in the history of the Mediæval Church.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. vii. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Numb. xxiv. 4.

During long centuries the religion of Jesus seemed to have fallen into a mere priestcraft. With a polity derived from the pagan empire, with worship and ritual borrowed from Buddhism, with a creed stereotyped and sanctioned by councils of contentious and passionate bishops, the putative Church of Christ passed from corruption to corruption as if it were destined to relapse into the paganism whose garb it had assumed — “the word of God was precious; there was no open vision.” The shrines were centres of jugglery and imposture, the central seat of the Papacy was a hotbed of murder and vice, of ambition and tyranny. The student of ecclesiastical history wonders how Christianity survived, and turns with sickened heart from the story of Catholicism to the brave and simple days of early Greece or of republican Rome. But there is a pure vein of silver light and truth running through those doleful ages. In some monastery cell, or in some solitude of the desert, would be found a man who had turned away from the strife, the ambition, the worldly pomp of the Church, to give his days



to meditation and prayer. A Francis at Assisi would be reading the sweet Word of God afresh in the woodlands and hearing it in the twitter of the birds. A Bernard would be fostering a communion with Jesus, not the Jesus of the wafer and the cist, not the Jesus of the Virgin or the Crucifix, but the living, present Saviour, Sovereign and Friend of the soul; and out of those rapturous meditations would come the words of loving passion which were to lift myriads of hearts to their Lord in song. A Thomas à Kempis would in the strait order of his convent be holding so close an intercourse with Christ that his *Imitatio* would come down to the aftertime as a fresh revelation of the Divine-human personality subduing the heart of His servant to His own image. A Brother Lawrence would be drawing from the subtle alchemy of Spring, in transmuting the dead timber into rustling foliage, the conclusion of the Presence of God, in the practice of which he could grow into the perfect likeness of the Saviour without the aid of church or priest, of sacrament or ceremony.

It was in these meditative souls that the Word of God was always coming fresh and pure, not only maintaining the thin promise of life in the midst of those gross corruptions, but forming into a vein of silver ore to gladden and enrich all subsequent ages.

In such meditation the man of God must habitually live.

III. We now turn to the third strand, of prayer, which must be closely and constantly intertwined with the other two. Prayerless study may make an erudite or even an eloquent man, but never a preacher. Prayerless meditation may issue in poetry or art, in tumult of stirring thought or passion of excited feeling — “while the heart muses the fire may burn” — but not in a revelation of God, or an authentic message from His lips. A man who is to be the spokesman of God must be much in prayer; nay, why shrink from the fine apostolic hyperbole? — must pray without ceasing. Breathing the atmosphere of prayer he must open his books to study, and read in the open books of Nature and the human heart. Beating

the air on the strong wings of prayer he must scale the mountain of meditation and remain poised in the vision of God to see the things which he is to communicate. He must suspect even Truth itself which approaches him when he is prayerless, and may be sure that if the fountain of prayer has run dry his sparkling waters of rhetoric and reasoning will prove to be a mirage in the sand. "Much reading and thinking," said Berridge, "may make a popular preacher, but much secret prayer must make a powerful preacher."

Ah, who is sufficient for these things?

But to give point to this contention let me quote a passage from the Diary of David Brainerd—Brainerd whom I am afraid your College of Yale expelled from its borders for insubordination, as my own university rusticated Shelley for daring to think earnestly and speak honestly. "I was greatly oppressed with guilt and shame this morning," he writes at the Forks of the Delaware, "from a sense of my inward vileness and pollution. About nine o'clock I withdrew to the woods for prayer,

but had not much comfort. . . . Towards night my burden respecting my work among the Indians began to increase much, and was aggravated by hearing sundry things that looked very discouraging—in particular that they intended to meet together next day for an idolatrous feast and dance. Then I began to be in anguish. I thought I must in conscience go and endeavour to break them up, and knew not how to attempt such a thing. However, I withdrew for prayer, hoping for strength from above. And in prayer I was exceedingly enlarged: my soul was as much drawn out as I ever remember it to have been in my life. I was in such anguish and pleaded with so much earnestness and importunity that when I rose from my knees I felt extremely weak and overcome; I could scarcely walk straight; my joints were loosed; the sweat ran down my face and body, and nature seemed as if it would dissolve. So far as I could judge I was wholly free from selfish ends in my fervent supplications for the poor Indians. I knew they were met together to worship devils

and not God, and this made me cry earnestly that God would now appear and help me in my attempts to break up this idolatrous meeting."

He succeeded in that special attempt; but the story is familiar to us all—how he succeeded in turning multitudes of the aboriginal inhabitants of this continent to Christ.

We have to remember that the Word of God is not merely a collection of truths which can be written in a book and learnt by rote. It is not merely a number of principles which require to be applied under new circumstances to different cases as they arise. But it is a vital energy passing from God to man at a given time and in a given place, which may be compared to a hammer that pounds the quartz rock, or a keen blade that severs the ligaments and nerves in the hands of a dissector. For the reception of this word the soul must, to use David Brainerd's expression, be "drawn out"; it must pass up to God like great feelers seeking nutriment; it must wrestle and strive in its narrow chamber until it is enlarged.

It is for this reason that printed reports of

sermons can never give us their real quality. They can render sometimes the rhythm of the sentences, the musical cadence of words, the swift movements of thought, the inevitable conclusions to which the argument passes. But it is only by hearing a sermon that you can tell whether it is drenched in prayer; the words of God are often very simple sentences, truths which are truisms; they are often quotations and applications of a perfectly familiar text. What gives the peculiar quality to the utterance is not the sentiment or the wording, but the fact that it has just come from God, that it has been received, in study or in meditation it may be, but certainly by prayer, and it quivers down into the hearts of men because the speaker has shot the arrow which the Lord has given him, at a venture on his part, but not at a venture on the Lord's.

Scientists, artists, writers frequently give us, as the fruit of their observations and meditations and lucubrations, rare and beautiful truths, truths which a spiritual nature knows instinctively are from God, are indeed the

word of God. But the world does not receive these truths as the word of God, does not recognise their origin, because the men who transmit them are not men of prayer. On the other hand, there have been great scientific investigators like Faraday, great artists like Fra Angelico, and great writers like John Foster, who have wrought at their tasks, as it were, on their knees, or pacing up and down in vigorous exercise of soul before God; and their truths, though sometimes to all appearance secular, have come home to the world as a message from God Himself. Such men do not differ essentially from prophets or preachers. The preacher's task is to imitate them. He is a student, but a prayerful student; he is given to meditation, and has "the inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude ;"

but it is a meditation nourished on prayer. He prays always in the Holy Ghost. By this he is distinguished from the mere teacher or lecturer. He receives and he delivers the word of the Lord.

I remember being deeply impressed by a passage in Smith's description of Kerry, which spoke about the Great Skellig, "a small rocky island once occupied by a monastery of St. Finian, and lashed by the most furious waves of the Atlantic. Women as well as men, by means of shallow hollows cut in the rock, climbed the smooth and dizzy cliff called the Stone of Pain, which rises many fathoms above the sea, visited the cross on the summit and performed their last perilous devotions at the extreme end of a projecting ledge of rock, but two feet in breadth, which hangs at a fearful height over the boiling waves."

It is as it were a symbol of all prayer. Is the question raised: How comes it that when God is so ready to speak to men, and is indeed ever seeking mouthpieces for His living and life-giving word, there are so few to speak it, the most part even of His professed ministers being mere droners at an altar, or reciters in a pulpit of words which are merely traditional and dead, utterly dead; how comes it that so high-famed an oracle is virtually silent because



there are not those who will seat themselves on the tripod and chaunt its verses? The answer is almost painfully simple: It is because prayer is arduous, and few will seriously attempt it.

We can pray no doubt in the sense that morning and evening we can utter our smooth petitions not unmixed with emotion; we can, too, in moments of peril and stress cry out to God with sufficient urgency for deliverance or relief; on rare occasions, under stirring influences, we can utter ejaculations of prayer which are real and efficacious enough. But it is hard, very hard, to climb our great Skellig — the shallow hollows in the rock afford but uncertain foothold — we shrink from that wide outlook on the foam of those perilous and forlorn seas; the head grows dizzy and the limbs tremble upon the narrow ledge. Indeed there are dark, stormy, and turbulent moments in prayer, when the tongue refuses to speak, and only the heart and the flesh cry out. We are too exposed up there on the ridge, and we know not if God will put His hand over us

while He passes by in the thunder and the earthquake and the rain. But if we are determined, if we are persistent in prayer, if we can toil at books and men, always praying, never fainting; if we can tread the desert ways of meditation, always praying; if we can—in humble temerity and with resolution made firm by weakness—grapple with God, spirit to spirit, knee to knee, hand to hand—since He graciously permits it—we may hear the still small voice; we may find truth flowing towards us like the dayspring from the dewy eyelids of the morning, or like the waters which issue from the cool clear fountains of the untainted rocks; we may speak to men, not in the faltering accents of surmise, but in the sharp-cut and convincing speech of *Thus saith the Lord*.

## LECTURE VII.



## LECTURE VII.

### THE LOGOS.

You will remember that in the last lecture the threefold way of receiving the Word of God was discussed in very general terms. No allusion was made, except in the illustration of Samuel Rutherford at the beginning, and in an occasional reference here and there, to the specific definition of the Word which forms the very centre of the Christian Revelation. In the third lecture a good deal was said about the significance of the Incarnation as a complete, and, in a sense, final manifestation of the Word of God. The task which is now set before us is to review the methods of receiving the word, which are open to the Christian preacher, in the light of the fact, and by virtue of the operation, of the Logos or *Verbum Dei*

becoming flesh and being presented to us in a historical Person.

The main bearing of this supreme truth may be stated in a sentence, though the full exposition of it is never likely to be effected. The Christian preacher differs from seekers after God such as Lao-Tse, Gautama, Zoroaster, or Socrates, and from prophets of an older dispensation, such as Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, or Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, in this respect, that, since the Word of God has been thus specifically revealed, his reception of it must move along the lines of the practical inward admission and the personal assimilation of Christ. He has a touchstone for testing the word received which was wanting to the men of God before the Incarnation. He has more. There is a positive content of the Word of God which is set before him in the Divine-human Saviour, and his duty is, by the methods which have already been sketched, but with results which for one who is not a Christian would be impossible, to spell out the meaning of that revealed Word, and to mystically receive into

his own life and person and consciousness the clear and speaking and living message, Christ.

The Christian preacher must be one "in whom Christ is formed," one whose personality has been subdued by Christ until every thought is in subjection to Him, and every exaltation of the heart and mind has been brought into submission to Him, one of whom it may be said with perfect literalness that "it is no longer he that lives, but Christ that lives in him." If what might seem to be the word of God coming to him ceases to interpret and to glorify Christ, he may know at once that the Spirit of God is not speaking to him, and he may at all times verify the word which comes through the channels of study, meditation, and prayer, by observing if it takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to him, if Christ grows before his soul as the Word of God Incarnate.

Let us revert for a moment to the illustration of Samuel Rutherford. Those long meditations and wrestling prayers in the little wood at Anwoth, which resulted in the marvellous sermons of the Sabbath Day, were not by

any means a vague movement in the spiritual void or a Pantheistic absorption in what has been in our day called the Over-soul. Nature does not seem to have had much to do with the impressions received or the effects produced, except so far as she utters

Such sounds as make deep silence in the heart  
For Thought to do her part.

The real process of that prolonged exercise was a close communion with the person of Christ, an intimacy which more and more assumed the character of a maintained dialogue between the soul and Him. The preacher after such a preparation appeared in his pulpit transfigured. The hearer was impressed with a feeling that Christ was speaking, and even in looking up seemed to see the features of Christ in the minister's transparent face. Those letters which have remained to the Church as the rich fruit of Rutherford's long exile from the pulpit have the same characteristic. Open the volume where you will, there is the name of Christ.



Read on and on, the writer is always engaged in a vain but joyful attempt to sum up the beauty and the sweetness of Christ, and in an equally joyful, but less vain, attempt to commend the beloved Lord to the reader, that every one may make a trial of the inexhaustible riches, for, as he says, "Come and see, is the most faithful messenger to speak of Him ; little persuasion would avail where this were."<sup>1</sup>

Or, to quote again a more modern saint, whose words have already been before us, James Gilmour of Mongolia has produced that singular impression upon the Church which is unique even among the many remarkable missionaries of our day, by simply adopting an *Imitatio Christi* as the secret of his life. The avowed purpose of this man's work was always to be like Christ. With this thought he plunged into the dreary and inhospitable land, lived in the comfortless tent, adopted the Mongolian dress, and learned the unknown speech. With this thought he stood day after day in

<sup>1</sup> Letter XXXIX.

the bleak market-place of the town dispensing medicines and dressing loathsome wounds, to withdraw in the evening to the coarse fare and mean lodging of a Chinese inn, where privacy was impossible, and the ordinary amenities of our Western life were unheard of. For, as he said in letters written towards the end of his life three years ago, "I have learned that the source of much blessing is just to go to Jesus and tell Him what you need. . . . No one teaches like Him, who also was the first of preachers. In daily, hourly, humble communication with Him you will want for no wisdom and for no guidance and for no shepherding. Rejoice in that you have Him to manage everything for you."<sup>1</sup>

Now before we turn to-day to consider a little more closely what is involved in this assimilation of the Logos, or Word of God, and how true preaching will consist in the complete exhibition of this assimilated Word, we may stimulate our minds to the inquiry by remembering that this is the secret of all real success

<sup>1</sup> *Life of James Gilmour*, p. 262.

in the Christian ministry. As has been very beautifully said:—

First seek thy Saviour out, and dwell  
Beneath the shadow of His roof,  
Till thou have scanned His features well  
And known Him for the Christ by proof;  
Such proof as they are sure to find  
Who spend with Him their happy days,  
Clean hands and a self-ruling mind  
Ever in tune for love and praise.  
Then, potent with the spell of Heaven,  
Go, and thine erring brother gain,  
Entice him home to be forgiven,  
Till he too see his Saviour plain.<sup>1</sup>

It is said that David Hume, whom we are not accustomed to think of as very susceptible to the message of the preacher, once exclaimed on hearing John Brown of Haddington, “That is the man for me; he means what he says; he speaks as if Jesus Christ were at his elbow.” One might have supposed that to touch David Hume a preacher would have to be a great metaphysician, learned in what was then

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Year.* St. Andrew’s Day.

“modern thought,” and with a ready armoury of proofs or arguments or evidences. But it was not so. The most forcible arguments would probably have been turned on the polished shield and breastplate of the sceptical philosophy. Appeals to the feelings would have been equally vain; for rationalism counts it a point of honour to cover all the human emotions with the close buckle of criticism. But a man speaking as if Jesus Christ were at his elbow was an argument, an appeal, which the great thinker was not studious to rebut. And we may say without undue censoriousness that the rarity of preaching which possesses this subtle quality accounts to a large extent for the prevailing indifference to sermons.

Now suppose a preacher is convinced that his real function in the pulpit is to set forth Christ in His fulness, and therefore the real preparation for his work must be the reception of Christ in his own person, he will very naturally put to himself the question from the beginning of his ministry, and keep it before him from week to week all through.

In what sense, by what means, can I assimilate Christ? What course must I adopt that the process may be fairly begun, and that, once begun, it may continue in a normal progress, and attain the measure of completeness which is for me possible?

It has been already stated that the methods mentioned in the last lecture are those which must be employed. We must now therefore review those three modes of receiving the Word of God in the light of that more specific conception of the Word which is now occupying our attention.

1. *Study.* There are few ministers who do not sooner or later make the discovery that, as study is an essential condition, so it is one of the chief snares, of their work. We are tempted, like Bacon in his youth, to take "all knowledge for our province;" and rightly judging that all truths and facts are of moment to the preacher, we range at large as fancy may dictate in the boundless fields of literature. We hardly realise how necessarily limited the time for study is, or how

impossible it is for any one of us to trace out the whole circle of human knowledge. Possibly we accept the maxim referred to in the last lecture, that we should seek to know a little of everything and all about something, and by the natural drift of a mind not consciously disciplined we take, as the subject on which we are to specialise, some branch of theology, possibly some field of science, philosophy, or history, it may be some department of literature, poetry, art, or even fiction. Almost unknown to himself, and perhaps with the tacit approval of his people, who are more bent on amusement or instruction than on treading the upward Way, the minister finds that while he studies enough of his Bible or his commentaries to prepare his weekly tale of sermons, the subject on which he is an authority, the subject which claims his best powers and the largest share of his scanty time is one of these self-chosen byways of study. Yes, byways they are for him, however interesting and valuable they may be in themselves and for others — mere byways

which divert him from his journey and prevent him from reaching his goal; for the only subject which should occupy this supreme place in the preacher's mind—the only subject on which he is committed to know everything, everything that is possible, or, let us say, possible for him, is CHRIST. There is the main and fair theme of his study. Let him by all means know a little of everything if he can, and as much of a few chosen subjects as he may without injury to the great purpose of his life. But he has in Christ a field of thought and study which will not leave him much leisure for other tillage. He has to learn a lesson which starts with a simple alphabet, but ends in a lore never yet fathomed. He has to know something which is most fitly defined by saying that “it passeth knowledge.”

The main cause of failure in the ministry, I would suggest, is simply this, that the man has neglected his chief business; he may be far from indolent, and even very busy—yes, usefully busy—but not at his own business. We

do not employ an architect because, neglecting the weary details, specifications, and quantities, construction, arrangement, and sanitation, he spends his days in sculpturing marble and earning a reputation as a sculptor. We do not employ a doctor because, leaving therapeutics and pharmacy, he follows eagerly the path of a chemist or a botanist and becomes a great authority on one of these subjects. Neither does the church in the long run want a minister who leaves the Word of God, Christ Jesus, and ceases to study Him, to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Him, to set forth His large completeness and sufficiency, in order to become an authority, however proficient, on some alien, although related, subject. To be a specialist even in theology is of no avail for the purpose of the ministry. Archæology, textual criticism, other criticism, are interesting enough if they contribute their lights to the great subject which has to be illustrated. But men would see Jesus, and they rightly apprehend that the minister's peculiar function is to show Him to them. They will pardon



his ignorance of other things, for we do not expect omniscience even in a student fresh from college. But they will not pardon ignorance of the one thing. If they find they know more of Christ than he does, or even as much; if they perceive in his discourse that they are entertained, dazzled, thrilled, but kept always at the gate of the speaker's personality, and never admitted through to Christ, they will turn away dissatisfied. Is Christ lifted up? Is He evidently set forth before their eyes? Are they sent away ravished with the thought of Him, drawn to Him, filled with Him? Then they will be very lenient to the preacher who, though not learned or eloquent or attractive, had submitted his body as a whole-offering to God for the manifestation of Christ to the people.

The literature of Christ is by no means the only thing in the study of Christ. It is no doubt very rich. There is the Bible, *i.e.*, the collection of those writings which "speak of Him," up to the end of the first century after His death. There is another Bible, not yet

put into a Canon, but dispersed abroad among the devotional literature of the world.

In that, as yet unformed, Canon, we should all put Thomas à Kempis, Samuel Rutherford, a good deal from George Fox and many others of the Quakers; and between the three outer points of Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Quakerism lie innumerable grades of Christ-literature; for all sections of the Church have contributed. It is that uncollected Canon, including especially the grand Psalter of Christian Hymnology, that holds us all together in the truest catholicity. This second Bible is read in all churches, though not authorised by your Government or ours. Every writing in it has this one note—it teaches the reader more about Jesus. Nothing is included in the collection which does not serve to reveal His power, His love, His unique greatness. I am told that Unitarians, like Channing, have contributed to this Bible; some of its writers have been as far from orthodoxy as the writer of *Ecclesiastes* was in the older Bible. But there the Book stands, the great Christ-book; and

the preacher should read in it and meditate on it day and night. He should constantly cleanse and renew the very roots of his own spiritual experience in that vast and tuneful fellowship, for it is precisely when "we have fellowship one with another that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." He should consider those heights of Christly living which others have attained — those aerial paths over the mountain ridges which he has not yet trodden. Henry Martyn reads in the Christ-book the life of Brainerd, and girds up his own loins and turns towards the starry track; Coleridge Patteson reads the life of Martyn, and his resolution is taken to seek the martyr's palm in the glowing seas and savage heathenism of the Pacific. The man of God who would rise to the stature of Christ must study all the applications of His wonderful teaching with the fixed conviction that not one of those Divine laws is a counsel of perfection, except in the sense that he too may, and must, be perfect. He must trace the true outlines of that Divine Person, and look into that wonder-

ful face until its lineaments are clear; he must well observe every action of that life until the Imago Christi illuminates every sphere of conduct and reveals clearly what we to-day are meant to be. No man who leaves Christ as a forgotten frontispiece at the beginning of his ministry, or as an antique picture hung in the dark corner of his study, can ever really preach; but the real preacher will be a man who is always throwing aside other pursuits and diverging from other ways, foregoing other friendships, averting his eyes from other faces, because he finds increasingly that the Christ-literature demands all his strength, that the portrait of the Four Evangelists grows and lives and moves beside him, that all men have been trying to look into those marvellous eyes, and that a day or a month or a year spent in winning one clear sweet glance or smile from His countenance is better spent than if one had attained the knowledge of an encyclopædist or the mental agility of a Hegelian.

2. *Meditation.* But what has just been said brings us over into the method of meditation.

If one were asked to account for the amazing vitality of the Church which claims for itself the specific title of Catholic — a vitality which has enabled it hitherto to face all changes and to possess all continents, adapting itself as readily to your democracy as it did to the aristocracies of the Old World — the readiest explanation would not be that which a Roman divine might give. The hierarchy, the sacraments, the fascinating ritual, might offer some explanation of her cheap and worthless victories, her ascendancy over weak, or ignorant, or indolent minds. But that which has secured her noble and eternal victories has been the continual maintenance, from the first age to the present, of the habit of *meditation* on the person of Christ. She has always had her mystics and her saints, men and women who turned aside from the crowded ways to contemplate in tearful wonder or rapturous adoration the Saviour Crucified. She has never made the mistake which the vigorous and self-reliant spirit of Protestantism constantly makes; she never regarded mysticism as a

term of reproach. Tauler and Madame Guyon were in some respects more at home in Catholicism than they could have been in any Protestant denomination; and unless Protestantism repents we shall find many souls turning back to the cloister and the cell, for the calm of contemplation and the quiet insight into realities, which the loud roar of the mart and the defiling lust of gold are making difficult in English-speaking communities.

There is in the Church of Santa Croce at Florence a little chapel to which we should do well to make our way, past all the pompous monuments of the great dead which occupy the nave. On the northern wall of the chapel Giotto has painted with perfect *naïveté* and veracity what he conceived to be the death-bed of St. Francis. By the lowly couch there are eleven brothers of the Order gazing at him, the twelfth. They are all in attitudes of reverence and adoration, and the faces which are turned towards the spectator are not stained with tears, but illuminated with smiles. The lips of four are bent down to kiss the *stigmata* in the

hands and feet. One, a dignitary with a biretta and an ermine tippet, is irreverently thrusting his hand into the wound in the side. For Giotto evidently would have us know that it is not necessarily high ecclesiastics to whom we must look for any true appreciation of "the marks of the Lord Jesus." Here is the best belief of the thirteenth century, expressed with all simplicity, that one man, brother Francis, had literally meditated upon his Lord until the very wounds of Christ were stamped on feet and hands and side. I need not pause to point out how hypnotism has in quite recent days explained that the mysterious stigmata are by no means incredible. A constant mental occupation with the idea of the crucifixion, and a living faith that one was identified with Christ, crucified and pierced with Him, might very well produce these physical signs. But it means that this man who exercised the greatest, the deepest, and on the whole, for two centuries at least, the most beneficial influence that any one exerted on mediæval life and thought, had acquired this unsought and even undesired power simply

by a perpetual absorption in his Saviour. Little he knew of books, or even of the Bible. Intellectually he was not distinguished even in an unintellectual age. But he had sought his Saviour out and dwelt "beneath the shadow of His roof," and by the intimate passages between him and his Lord he had obtained a real revelation of Him which broke upon his contemporaries with something of the same astonishment, admiration, and gratitude which the Incarnation excited in the first believers.

The stigmata which may be marked in us are not of the *naïf* and carnal kind that was appropriate to an Italian monk of the thirteenth century. A whole-hearted and a whole-minded contemplation of Christ would not lead us to a picture of Perugino's, with the Cross clear cut against the mellow sky, and the delicate cherubs with flying scrolls catching the blood from the nail-prints in golden chalices; nor would it occupy us so much with the death, still less the physical sufferings, of our Lord. It would lead us rather to a rare impression of the truth and beauty of His earthly life, and to



a rapturous recognition of the reality of His heavenly reign. But this may be safely advanced, that the personal contact with Christ experienced along the covert path of meditation is precisely what the preacher wants in this as in every age.

There never was a stronger or a stranger image used by a religious teacher than that command which the Lord gave His disciples to eat His flesh and drink His blood. Its significance is so deep and so exacting that we cannot wonder if men have tried to evade its searching demands by eating and drinking the bread and wine of the Sacrament with the robust faith that this is what He meant. But no one who reads the sixth chapter of St. John would for a moment suppose that He was speaking of anything so external, so material, or, let us say it with all deference to those who differ from us, so trivial as this. It is evident that the figure of speech must be interpreted in a spiritual experience, for as He says, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit" (vi. 63).

Here, then, is a profound spiritual demand that the Saviour makes upon His representatives. They are to enter into the very taste and nutriment of His Incarnation and His Sacrifice. He became flesh, and the body was broken. His heavenly life was poured into the vessel of an earthly life, which is symbolised by blood, and this blood was shed for the remission of sins. The true apostle of Christ is he who has so absorbed these mysterious truths, and has by the energy of faith so entered into an identification with the Lord who became flesh and died, that his soul is maintained upon this meat precisely as the Israelites were fed upon the manna which fell daily from heaven.

And just as in that parabolic miracle the Lord gave the bread and the fishes to the disciples that they might minister to the multitudes, and the scanty store was increased up to the level of the need and beyond, so the minister of the gospel can, with the apparently small supplies which are in his hand, feed all the hungry spirits before him to repletion, in proportion to the fulness and constancy of his own

receiving from the hands of his Lord. Men are not nurtured on idle words, nor even on eloquent and brilliant words; they turn disappointed away from a man who simply discourses ably about the things of God. But when the preacher has, in long and satisfying feasts at the board of Christ, received and assimilated the very Person of Christ, until his flesh and spirit are penetrated with the Divine Personality, and his breath is sweet with the odour of Christ, and his very garments smell of that fragrant nard and cassia, the hearers receive a food—a food to the spirit—they also from the hands of their pastor receive the Bread of Life, which is the Incarnate and the self-offered Word of God.

It is when the voice of our Beloved is sounding in our hearts like the thrilling music of birds among the budding quicks, and the sense of His life in us is as the turning of the fresh earth and the teeming activity of its vernal bosom, that our speech becomes expressive and vital, convincing and redemptive; we very literally “hold forth the word of life.”

3. *Prayer.* We are so accustomed to think of prayer as an utterance to God that we sometimes overlook the other side of it. But Christian prayer is as much an utterance from God, for the Spirit within makes the intercession, the voice of God speaks through the soul like the wind in the strings of a harp. A true preacher must be much in secret prayer, and in prayer of a specific kind, viz., prayer in the name of Jesus. It is not enough that he should wrestle with his doubts, as John Foster did — marking a little track in the aisle of his chapel, where, through the long nights, he paced backwards and forwards in spiritual exercise, and gradually declared victory. While prayer is only a conflict with doubt, or even a resistance to the enemy, while it is a toilsome climb up a narrow steep to heights that have not been sighted, it may be very necessary, very useful, and even very helpful to the preacher who has to address souls in doubt, but it is not yet prayer in the name of Jesus. To pray in His name means to occupy His standpoint in prayer, to pray with His convic-

tions, with His assurance, with His results. It is therefore the outcome of an identification with Him, when the soul, passing the foam-drenched headlands, and crossing the bar, lies in the still haven of the Lord's own serene consciousness with the Father. The Father always heareth Him. The Father always hears those who thus stand in Him, enveloped in His personality, filled with His Spirit, and pray. Prayer was the breath that the Son breathed on earth, and he who is in Christ, and is assimilating Christ, breathes the same atmosphere; his bosom rises and falls with the same rhythmic movement.

Perhaps this is a not inappropriate place to observe that a true minister bent on ministering the word of life will bestow as much pains on the prayers in which he leads the devotions of his people as on the discourses in which he tries to teach them. The peculiar danger of using a liturgy is that it relieves the officiating minister from any responsibility in this devotional leadership. A good voice and a sincere heart are all that is wanted. A danger of

another kind besets the use of extemporary prayer—it becomes too facile; the most exalted utterances are learnt and crystallised, and used like flowers and fruits which have been turned into stone in a cave of stalagmite; any intelligent person can without difficulty make and utter the most eloquent and stirring prayer in public, for he can use the language of Scripture—and the Psalms and the Epistles of St. Paul contain the utmost perfection of prayer-forms that human lips have ever devised. It never seems to me, therefore, that the contention between liturgical and extemporary prayer is worth maintaining. The real distinction is between prayer in the name of Jesus, as we have just been considering it, and prayer in our own name.

The duty of the Christian minister is to bring his people in each service to that mountain-top where Jesus retires to pray. No man can do that who has not been there himself and learnt all the footpaths up the hill. In vain shall we expect to pray in the name of Jesus on Sunday unless we have been praying

in His name all the week. No dress sits easily when it is new — and Sunday clothes, which seem by prescription to be permissible in the pews, are useless in the pulpit. You must stand up to preach and pray in your weekday clothes; and therefore the weekday coat must be, prayer in the name of Jesus. Only so can any man touch the multitudinous wants which the people feel, or ought to feel. Only so can he exhibit the confidence of prayer and the complete certainty that every petition is heard. Only so can he show, what is indeed the fact, that all real prayer is the operation of God in the soul, the preliminary process by which He carries out His great spiritual purposes. In one sense no man ever prays for God, for when he prays God is already there.

Now no one can deny that a minister is exposed to a constant danger and temptation. He is peculiarly likely to lose “the grace of devotion.” The necessity of often uttering prayers — even when his heart is prayerless — brushes off the fine bloom of prayer. The constant

use of the name Jesus wears away the significance and the need of praying "in the name of Jesus." I am inclined to think that every professional minister who at the end of ten years is spiritually alive, and keenly sensitive to the things of God, should be regarded as a miracle of grace. Life is very short, and when so much of our time must be occupied in public prayer we are inclined to stint private prayer. The regular task being to speak about Jesus, to prove the veracity of the gospel, and to expound the doctrines of our several creeds and confessions, we do not piercingly feel the necessity for pressing into His presence, and sitting down at His board, for holding His hand and undergoing the personal transformation of His indwelling life. Some of the dullest books I have ever read have been books on the Person of Christ. The most exasperating sermon I ever heard was one from an Anglican priest, on "Jesus wept." When Christless men speak of Jesus, and when prayerless men lead our prayers, we tread the valley of the shadow of death, and taste the gall of bitterness.



My young brothers, who are to speak God's word to this generation, you have a task before you which is perhaps more arduous than you think. Naturally your friends wish for you much prosperity and joy. God knows better than your friends—it is not in that way we hear the word of God. “Devotion is not to be acquired in the joyousness of feast and festival, but in sorrow and silence. All joy that comes not from God passes quickly away, and leaves the soul stained and wounded.”<sup>1</sup> Prosperity and joy are the bane of prophets and of apostles. God does not inflict on them that bane. The true argument against asceticism is that it is unnecessary; it is the wilful adoption of a discipline which God carries out better in His own way. The *Askesis*, or spiritual gymnastic of the man of God, is determined by the very conditions of his work. He has to receive the Word of God for himself—that Word in its fulness is a suffering and a crucified Saviour, and to receive Him must mean to suffer with Him, and to be cruci-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *Garden of Roses*, p. 24.

fied with Him. Let a man be resolutely set on thus receiving, that he may preach, the true Word of God, and he will find himself committed to a way which is more laborious and painful than the hair-shirt of the anchorite or the whip of the Flagellant. His face will be anointed with joy, and deep down in his heart will sing the quiet waters of peace that flow from God and to God, but the joy and the peace will be of the kind which the world would call sorrow and conflict. For the path he treads is the way of study and meditation and prayer — study of Christ, the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, meditation on Christ until Christ is formed within him, prayer in Christ until the wells of supplication which are unsealed in the closing chapters of the Fourth Gospel, in Gethsemane and on the Cross, are rising and throbbing in him. Paul with his thorn in the flesh, Robert Hall with his life-long excruciating pains, Robertson with the constant fret and strain of his life, Spurgeon with his constant collapses and premature death, are but illustrations of a

wide-reaching law, that the Word of God, received by a man for God's own purposes, is like that little roll which in the mouth was sweet, but within was bitter; for the heart and the flesh cry out, and the inward crucifixion is not achieved in a day. It is not so much the utterance as the reception of the Word which is the condition of utterance, that makes the great demand upon the man's endurance and faithfulness.



## LECTURE VIII.



## LECTURE VIII.

### THE PREACHER'S PERSONALITY.

I CANNOT perhaps more fitly pass from the subject of the last two lectures, the reception of the Word of God, to the subject of the present lecture, the personality of the preacher, than by quoting a verse from one of the noblest examples of a true pastor that our English race has ever possessed, George Herbert ; he says —

The holy men of God such vessels are  
As serve Him up, who all the world commands.  
When God vouchsafeth to become our fare,  
Their hands convey Him who conveys their hands.  
O what pure things, most pure must those things be  
Who bring my God to me !

If you have followed me in what has been already said, you will not be detained by the

apparently sacramentarian suggestion of these lines ; but you will cordially agree with the poet that it is the duty of the minister first to receive, and afterwards to convey to others, the very being and essence of Him who is the Word of God. And you will be inclined to lay more stress on the need that the hands of such ministrants should be pure than he, who by the Articles of his Church was bound to teach that evil men can minister the Word and Sacraments without the effect of Christ's ordinances being taken away.<sup>1</sup> I have certainly spoken in vain unless you are prepared to admit that while God may undoubtedly speak to men in many ways, and without any human intervention at all, He will not, even if He could, use evil men to be the ministrants of His Word. Evil men may serve as priests, no doubt. Evil men may make vigorous and loyal ecclesiastics. But, as in the old external covenant they must be pure who bear the vessels of the Lord, so in the spiritual society of Christ no man can see God unless he is pure in heart, and no

<sup>1</sup> Article XXVI. of the Church of England.



man can either receive or deliver the Word of God unless he is inwardly cleansed, his unclean lips touched with a purifying coal, and his conduct made a not altogether imperfect mirror of Him whom he is called to preach.

The truth which is now to occupy us is this: the preacher's own life and character, completely subdued to the will of God, and renewed in the image of Christ, must be the factor which gives force to what he says, and supplies more or less the many gaps which must remain in even the most exhaustive curriculum of pulpit instruction. The preacher must himself be a true sermon, to adapt Milton's noble thought about every poet being himself a true poem, and he must be so far better than any sermon he can preach, that he really in some degree expresses the sum total of all his sermons.

It is always to me exceedingly impressive that the earliest master of English poetry, writing in a period of great ecclesiastical corruption, when priests and friars and palmers and nuns had won an evil name, not only for

themselves, but for the Church, should have thrown all his power into the description of a true pastor. The Reformation was in the distant future, heralded only by its Morning Star, and the principles which Wycliffe advocated were practically accepted only by the persecuted Lollards, when Chaucer drew his undying picture of the faithful minister, and asserted that article of faith in relation to preaching which I wish to press upon your attention to-day. I shall venture to quote Chaucer's verses on the "poor parson of a town," simply turning them into modern English so far as to make them readily intelligible.

Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder,  
 But he ne lafȝe not for rain ne thunder,  
 In sickness nor in mischief to visit  
 The farthest in his parish, much and lite,  
 Upon his feet and in his hand a staff.  
 This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,  
 That first he wrought and afterward he taught ;  
 Out of the gospel he the wordës caught,  
 And this figure he added eke thereto  
 That if gold rustë, what shall iron do ?

. . . . .

Well ought a priest ensample for to yive  
By his cleanness, how that his sheep should live.

The poetry of a nation is the deepest pulse of its life; the poets who attain rank among the immortals are they who succeed in expressing the truest and most permanent principles of the national faith. And in the dawn of English poetry shines this lasting truth, significant for America as for England, that English-speaking men, with their curious dislike of lies, and their persistent admiration of facts as such, have refused to believe in any prophet of God's Word who does not exhibit it in his life; while they have, with that odd and illogical tolerance which has always characterised them, forgiven almost any crudities of doctrine and faults of natural ability, if they perceive in the minister a course of conduct and a type of character which are in harmony with the gospel that is preached. For, "first he wrought and afterward he taught" — that is the secret of every successful ministry on English soil and among English-speaking men. And notwithstanding the appalling responsi-

bilities which may seem to prevent a preacher from advocating the doctrine, we are forced to admit that in this point at any rate the English view is thoroughly Apostolic, just as the idea of the Anglican Church on the subject is thoroughly Roman. For St. Peter exhorts the presbyters, or ministers, to be themselves "ensamples of the flock" (1 Pet. v. 3). And St. Paul is even bolder, entreating his people to be imitators of him,<sup>1</sup> and describing the result of his preaching as the production of that imitation.<sup>2</sup>

My attention was called some time ago to a clergyman in a fashionable English watering-place, who not only practised, but even preached, the doctrine that the people were to do what he told them and not what he did; his conduct was openly and notoriously out of harmony with the gospel, but he fell back on the Articles of his Church, and encouraged his hearers to believe that the grace of the Church was flowing through his own eloquent but insincere lips. It is a melan-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 16, xi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. i. 6

choly illustration of the degradation which is resulting in England from the revival of a debased ecclesiasticism, that this church was always crowded with young men and young women who were only too glad to find a doctrine which could reconcile a certain religious profession with an unmodified worldliness. If our English race is to be saved and to accomplish its vast destiny for the good of the world, it must revert to the teaching of its earlier seer, Geoffrey Chaucer; it must demand that its preachers first manifest the gospel in their life and conduct, and then expound it from the pulpit. And therefore the Schools of the Prophets must be prepared to lead the way, and to face the exacting necessity, that the character of the minister shall be a fuller exposition of his gospel than his sermons.

And before I go any further, let me utter my protest against the danger of popularity. Popular preacher! it is a term that fills one with misgiving. What has the preacher to do with popularity! Is it not enough that the

disciple should be as his Lord? Was his Lord a popular preacher? Yes, perhaps, in the sense that the people felt compelled to listen, but no, certainly no, in the sense that they were eased and pleased with what they heard, and most assuredly no, in the sense that they were prepared to give Him a high social standing, a tribute of admiration or veneration, or a large endowment of earthly good. Popular the Master was in the greatest way. He has for nearly nineteen centuries drawn men to Himself, and His brief utterances have riveted the attention of one generation after another. But the popularity of this noble kind was secured by a method and a preaching which roused all the orthodoxies of His day into bitter opposition and led to His crucifixion at the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities of His nation. This is the only popularity which the minister of Christ should covet or expect. That grand but singular petition of the Moravian liturgy should always be upon his lips and in his heart, "From the unhappy desire of becoming great, good Lord, deliver me."

But it is time for us to grapple a little more closely with this question of Personal Character in the Preacher.

Horace Bushnell, who was himself a fine instance of the persecuted popularity found in the right delivery of the Word of God, in discussing the necessary talents for preaching, laid down one condition which has always struck me as singularly valuable: the preacher must have "a good personal atmosphere." "It was not," says Bushnell, "Jesus's look, nor His declamation, nor His fine periods; not even His prodigious weight of matter; but it was the sacred exhalation of His quality, the aroma, the auroral glory of His person. He took the human person to exhale an atmosphere of God that should fill and finally renew creation, bathing all climes and times and ages with its dateless ineradicable power," &c. It might seem to follow, as a matter of course, that one, who has been seeking to receive the Word of God in the methods which we have been considering, would by the very process obtain this "good personal atmosphere;" but

so subtle are the inconsistencies of the human mind, and so unfortunately possible is it to combine great spiritual sensibility with serious moral defects, that, as a simple matter of fact, some of the most eloquent, and apparently inspired, preachers of God's Truth have been a reproach to the gospel they have delivered. Declaring the necessity of unworldliness, they have themselves been ambitious, avaricious, and selfish.<sup>1</sup> Preaching the duty of Love, they have been suspicious, malignant, quarrelsome, and uncharitable. Expecting others to be humble, they have become notable examples of vanity, conceit, self-esteem, and pride. The only hope of getting good from their preaching has been not to know them, and even that hope has generally been vain, because a man can hardly preach without being known. There are, there have always been, some

<sup>1</sup> As Keble says of Balaam —

“Yet in the Prophet's soul the dreams of Avarice stay.

He hears the Almighty's word,

He sees the angel's sword,

Yet low upon the earth his heart and treasure lie.”



preachers who are constantly exercising a great influence on those who never hear them ; there are, and always have been, others who never exercise any real influence on those who are always hearing them. The first very often are found speaking to a very few, and their faithful ministry seems to open a fountain of living waters in the heart of every hearer, so that the tiny congregation disperses week by week, like water-carriers in the arid East, bearing their draughts of refreshment and inspiration to all whom they meet. The second are very often found addressing a crowd ; the genius, the eloquence, the power, are, however, so mingled with egotism and ostentation, that even the crowd, though attracted by the brilliant gifts, disperses unedified and unvivified, while, to the outsider, who is only too ready to deride, the whole matter becomes an occasion of scorn and scepticism.

The difference lies wholly in character : in the one case the hallowed personality is a sweet channel through which the Spirit of God flows to the thirsty souls of men, in the other

the personality for all its great attractions is too choked with its resplendent egotism to be a channel for anything but itself. We never read of St. John addressing great audiences. The only sermon of his that is recorded is a very brief one which, it is said, he used to deliver as an old man whenever he entered the assembly of the Church at Ephesus. He would spread out his aged hands and say to the people, "Little children, love one another." Yet no preacher was ever so successful in receiving and delivering the Word of God as St. John. Even St. Paul's vehement and copious eloquence has not gone farther than the quiet, penetrative quality which breathes through the three Johannine Epistles. It seems to be a consecrated personality speaking. There is no rich imagery; there is no connected argument; there is, strictly speaking, no logic; unsympathetic readers often turn impatiently away from this group of the New Testament writings, calling it mystical, dreamy, unsubstantial. But there is no question that the character which lies behind these

Epistles, the character of one who, having touched and handled the Word of Life, had been born again and completely transformed by the admission of this Word into his own being, produces an effect on us all out of all proportion to the number or the apparent cogency of the words. What the preacher is determines in the end the effect of what he teaches.

In the course of last year Dr. Griffith John, of Hankow, sent home a detailed account of a Chinaman, named Wang, who had recently passed away. So unprepossessing was the man's countenance that even the charity of the missionary hesitated to believe the early professions of faith. But under the converting power of the gospel he became not only a Christian, but a teacher, who exercised an extraordinary influence upon the Church at Hankow, and afterwards in the new mission at Chung King. The singular testimony that the native Christians gave to the man was, that "there was no difference between him and the Book." This should be said of all

preachers; and where it can be said, even very plain preaching will become effectual; it is not every one that can understand a sermon, it is not every sermon that can be understood; but every one can understand a Christly character, and every Christly character carries conviction to the observer.

We are coming, then, to the central point of the present lecture. In addition to those great demands which preaching makes upon the brain and the spirit, the demands of study and meditation and prayer which have been already examined, there is this demand, greater and more important than all the rest, that the preacher's inward life should be a complete expression of the Truth that he has to deliver, and that his outward conduct should be in harmony with the faith which he professes. He may not shrink from using the Apostolic command, nay, his ministry must be a failure unless he can use it, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ."<sup>1</sup> He is as one

<sup>1</sup> The great Gibbon pronounces a remarkable judgment on William Law, who had been a private chaplain or tutor in his

who has gone into a country of bad farming to teach the farmers better methods, and the first requirement is that he should keep a model farm. For there are certain alternations of crops, there are ways of draining and enriching the land, there are breeds of cattle and sheep to be reared, which demand some faith from ignorant men. Results appear only slowly—and meanwhile prospective gain involves present loss. It will be useless to give fine lectures to the slow, bucolic men; they will advance against the bravest theories the bad but dear customs of their ancestors. To them the new has the appearance of the vicious, and the old is in their minds another name for the good. But if their agricultural missionary, working in soil like their own, and under the same skies, using no implements which they cannot obtain, and sowing no seeds which are not within their knowledge, presents

father's house. "In our family William Law left the reputation of a worthy and pious man, who believed all that he professed and practised all that he enjoined." (Gibbon's *Memoirs of my Life and Writings*.)

a farm that yields better and more regular crops, that does not fail in bad seasons, but can in a sense defy the chances of outrageous fortune, they will yield docile ears, and will, however sheepishly, carry out in practice what in argument they would never admit. The preacher is "God's husbandry." He must watch his own estate. A fault in another man's property must send him back to his own to see how it stands in that respect before he says a word. A new method must be tested on his own land before he suggests it to the rest. If he ever ventures to pass beyond an actual experience and to speak upon the good harvest which will follow from a certain harrowing and purging of the land and the use of a certain seed, he must have done the work first and put in the seed, and be in the quiet expectation of the crop before he speaks.

To be specific, it is vain to preach any sermons at all, unless, as St. Paul says, the preacher has love in his heart—love to God, love to men. If frankly he finds he cannot love, is too cold and callous, or perhaps too

soured, embittered, and cynical, let him come down from the pulpit, and go to the Cross, and see if his bitter-thoughted heart can there be sweetened. If not, he had best not enter his pulpit again.

Buddha, we are told, once met a monster, raging terribly, shaking the hills and forests with his voice. The monster approached to tear him in pieces, but he looked up and said, "Poor friend, I love even thee." As he spoke the monster shrank and became a dove which circled round his head, singing, "Hate hath no harm for love, and love unarmed is master of every evil." There is a monster ready to destroy every preacher who cannot disarm and transform it by love. It is useless, strange as it sounds, to speak the Truth, yes, even *The Truth*, unless we can speak it in love. I have heard of preachers whom little children dread; young people cannot take their troubles to them; weary and world-worn men are repelled by their glittering intellects and barren asseverations of truth. These should be in the philosopher's chair, not in the Christian pulpit.

God *is* love, and therefore a word of God which is not aglow with love does not proceed immediately from God, and will certainly fall useless to the ground.

Or does it seem a hard saying that a man had better not preach if he has not joy? Indeed the joy of the Lord is the preacher's strength. "Always rejoicing" is among the articles of his perpetual equipment. If a man preaches God's Word, as if he felt, to use the old English expression, that he has to "dree his weird;" if his countenance is dark with perplexity, and his eyes shadowed with doubt, God's Word itself will become phantasmal, the hollow echo of a voice that is still.

But it is not necessary to go into details any further. For the character of the preacher is described, and the mode of its production is suggested in that nine-fold fruit of the Spirit which is mentioned in Gal. v. 22. That fruit (*καρπὸς τοῦ Πνεύματος*) is one fair and comely growth, a fruit of rich pulp, sweet flavour, downy skin, strong stalk, and productive core, pleasant to the senses, lovely in its complete-



ness. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, benevolence, beneficence, faithfulness, gentleness, self-restraint, — that is, a complete Christian character; this harmonious character must be possessed and presented by every one who would rightly declare the Word of God. Nor must we suppose that these qualities are, like the charismata of the Spirit, distributed among God's saints, as though each should have one, but none must expect more — as if love were to be held as a compensation for the want of self-restraint, benevolence for the want of beneficence, faithfulness for the want of gentleness, long-suffering for the want of peace. No, they are all qualities subtilly combined in the harmony of the one fruit; and the mode of their production is given when the fruit is called the fruit of the Spirit. Indeed, when the preacher seeks, as he should seek, for the endowment of the Spirit and of power, or for the illumination of the Spirit for wisdom and truth, let him realise that the fruit of the Spirit must be in his life before either wisdom or power can be in his ministry. The Christian char-

acter is the first and indispensable charisma of the Spirit, the Christian character in its completeness. A man must be complete in Christ before he can preach Christ; for all he says is necessarily interpreted by what he is. I dare not use the English word which is now unhappily steeped in misleading associations. But the preacher must be what St. Paul would call *teleios*.<sup>1</sup> The new man in the image of Christ must be formed in him, formed, though still growing. And the ground of this necessity lies not only in his own need, but also in the familiar fact that actions speak louder than words. If, for example, to take the most trifling example, a minister has not control of his temper, but betrays irritation and annoyance, or breaks out into strong and unjust expressions, — venial as bad temper may seem in the eyes of the world, — his preaching is all discredited. That unhappy conflagration has spread a broad patch of charred land between him and his congregation, which will not be covered with green shoots again for a season

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 6; Phil. iii. 15.

or two. Yet no one has discovered the secret of complete self-control except in the whole-hearted surrender of the will to God and in the fulness of the Holy Spirit as a personal and continuous inward experience.

But in dwelling thus upon the requirement of character, and showing the need that the preacher should be in a position boldly to appear as an ensample to his flock, we are met by an objection and a genuine difficulty which seems to be involved in the life of holiness. Surely, it may be said, if any minister takes the ground that has just been recommended, he will become intensely self-conscious, and his preaching will be attended with a spiritual pride, which, however decently veiled, must soon be an offence and a loathing to his hearers; granted that he has laid aside many or most of the common faults to which men are liable, what are they all in comparison with this colossal spectre of Egotism which has been conjured up before our eyes? The objection is so plausible that it has probably operated more than any other cause in pre-

venting Christian ministers from resolutely and earnestly taking the place to which they were called, when their Master said that they were to be in the world, witnesses of Him in their own person. For it is always easier to lay claim to a sacerdotal authority which rests only on office and orders than to that Divine Authority which springs out of ethical and spiritual realities. But plausible as the objection is, it must be faced and thrown, for it is an objection against the whole doctrine of Christian holiness, and it can be met only by leaving the common ways of specious talk and going into the secrets of that Divine life which the man of God, for all his natural faults and frailties, is required to live.

Let us observe that there is, notwithstanding the appearance, no real danger of any holy person being puffed up with pride; for holiness is Christlikeness, and Christ says, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." Not only may we say with one, against whom the charge was preferred, that he encouraged pride by laying claim to the fulness and com-

pleteness of the Christian life, "Nay, but I include humility in the very definition of that completeness;" we may go farther, humility is the first and most essential element of holiness, the self-emptying which is required in order to let Christ have His way in a human heart is so thorough and absolute that it leaves no root of pride to spring up in the exhausted soil. The very conviction which says, It is no longer I, but Christ that dwelleth in me, while it presents the indwelling Saviour as the object of reverence and imitation, makes any reversion to self-exaltation not only illogical, but distasteful, and in the last resort exquisitely painful. "Do not talk of Dr. Carey," said that great Christ-filled missionary from the bed of sickness, surrounded by his admiring friends, "but talk of Dr. Carey's Saviour." And when Paul ventured to say, "Be ye imitators of me," so far from implying self-exaltation or self-esteem, the exclamation sprang entirely from a life that was too "hid with Christ in God" to be any longer conscious of an egotistic impulse. What is it that subdues

and fascinates us in the *Imitatio Christi*? It is at first sight a piece of prolonged self-introspection — it is the religion of the cell, the writer lives within the walls of a monastery, and his phraseology is always limited by his conditions — the very word “religion” to him means a conventual life — duties and obedience have reference to the orders of his Prior — worship means the adoration of ascetic orisons or the half-superstitious offering of the Mass. Surely this must be morbid, self-centred, self-seeking, the vicious circle of Egoism. How comes it that unbelievers, no less than believers, — yes, even Positivists like George Eliot, whose ethics is Altruism, and whose deity is the collective humanity, — have found in the brief and simple sentences the bread on which the spirit can live and grow? Is it not because the real imitation of Christ, that assimilation of the Personal Saviour which enables a man to speak with authority, and even to stand out as an example to his fellows, is from its very nature the progressive decay of self-consciousness in the soul, and the sub-

stitution of the Being, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness?

Yes, there is something more than this. A truth becomes apparent as we walk with meditative step deeper and deeper into the holy places of God. When a man has begun to admit to himself, that in order to receive the word of God he must quiet his spirit and lie bare before God, like the placid waters of a lake which receives the image of the Infinite Heavens, and that before he can deliver what he has received he must permit it to have free course and be glorified in his own person, until the light begins to shine not only as a reflection on his face, but as a lamp that sends its rays up from within; when the high call of God sounds in his heart that he should first practise what he is to preach, and should first be what he invites others to become; he is set on a way of rigorous self-discipline and manful wrestling with hydra-headed monsters which has little tendency to puff him up, but rather keeps him for ever concerned and watchful and indescribably humble.

Consider, it is not the holy man that is conceited; it is not he who feels the life of God in the soul, and is kept bowed with a sense of the constant visitation, and awestruck by the transaction of Divine miracles, cleansing, sustaining, and strengthening him within. He surely is entirely debarred from conceit who has had the Vision and the afflatus and the command, and whose voice trembles with the rapturous Trisagion, as he exclaims, "Thanks be to God which giveth me the victory! Nay, I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me. Was there ever one weaker or poorer or more sinful than I? but I am washed, I am rich, I am strong in Him." The marvel of a real saving process in the soul is this, it is too manifestly the work of God to leave any room for boasting. But he rather, you will notice, is conceited who puts it to the credit of his humility that he does not admit the perfect work of God within, and therefore is not disposed to glorify it.

That is the true Egotism, the retention of the sinful *I* that was to be crucified with Christ



and was not, and the perpetual flaunting of the imperfections of the soul which was to have been subdued and quickened by the power of the Risen Christ, and is not. Unhappily the humility which refuses to accept the great responsibility of becoming through a lively faith a true exhibition of Christ's saving power, proves to be nothing but a limitation of His saving power, and a slur upon the fulness of His salvation. Like priest, like people. If the very pastors of Christ's flock refuse the command of God, "Be ye holy, as I also am holy," it is no wonder that the standard of Christian achievement is low among the sheep of His fold. "If gold shall rust, what will the iron do?"

I conceive, therefore, the real preacher of the Word as one who is before all other things occupied in keeping clean the vessel which is to deliver and distribute the things of God, "purging himself from all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." His chief concern is not to prepare sermons, but to prepare himself to

deliver sermons. He is no vendor of simples that he has not tried, but the supreme instance of the effect which his simples can produce. He is too intent on becoming holy to even say that he is holy, and yet as the mighty process of the Divine Love goes on in his heart, subduing sin, and developing the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit, he cannot but bear witness to the thing that he knows ; he is constrained to say to his people, " Would God ye were as I am ! "

I conceive his sermons as only fragments of himself, and when his best efforts to exhibit a truth have apparently failed, the failure is really retrieved because every one knows the man that was behind the effort. He preaches the Atonement, and there is more than one fault of logic in his exposition, but he is so obviously at one with God Himself, that the severest critic inclines to follow his way, if not to use his arguments. He blunders possibly in his presentation of the Trinity, uses a trivial illustration, and you would think has sent a score of his most thoughtful people over to Unitarianism ; but no, he was himself the best

illustration of the Trinity, for the Son of God was manifestly to him the means of resting in His Father's bosom, and the Spirit that gave vitality to his imperfect words was more sensibly Divine than the Athanasian Creed had made it. And when he comes to deal with the ethics of the Christian life he has a power which the most brilliant moral philosopher could not excel, he exhibits that of which he speaks. He preaches truth as one who is sensitively veracious and sincere, purity as one whose own thought is cleansed, charity as one who "believes all things and hopes all things," courage and fidelity as one who always leads in the forefront of the battle, and is the first to mount the breach, the last to leave the field.

It is this inward life of holiness stedfastly maintained which gives him a firm and hopeful spirit in the midst of shocks which seem to shake the faith, and in face of foes that will give no quarter to Christianity. Whatever hesitation may occur in his treatment of dogmas there is none in his treatment of life; whatever misgivings come to him concerning

the world and the Church, he has none concerning the way of personal holiness; for that is its own witness. His centre of certainty is so situated, and so defended, that he does not travel out far to correct and denounce others; and though he entertains no illusions about the grim monsters that ravage the earth, and knows that he and mankind are at present outside the gleaming gates, guarded by the Seraphim with flaming swords, yet

Forc'd from his shadowy paradise,  
His thoughts to Heaven the steadier rise :  
There seek his answer when the world reproves :  
Contented in his darkling round,  
If only he be faithful found,  
When from the East the eternal morning moves.

## LECTURE IX.



## LECTURE IX.

### METHODS AND MODES.

“He that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully.”  
—JER. xxiii. 28.

I HAVE detained you during all the preceding lectures in the consideration of the one thing needful. This one thing—that the preacher should veritably receive the Word of God before he attempts to deliver it—is of such moment, that all the other questions which are discussed in a science of Homiletics seem to be secondary. The form and the composition of sermons—whether they should be written and read, written and memorised, or studied and extemporised—the style of delivery—the physical conditions of effective preaching—even the topics and texts which should be selected—are, relatively speaking, unimportant. That counsel of Demosthenes

—that the first and the second and the third thing in oratory is delivery — does not apply to preaching. The first thing stands by itself. The one question is, Has this preacher “felt the Spirit of the Highest” — has the Word of the Lord veritably come to him — has it burnt as a fire in his bones until he cries, Woe is me if I preach not?

But if we may now assume that this supreme condition is secured, I for one am prepared to attach a considerable importance to the secondary things. “Let him speak My word faithfully” will cover not only the fearless proclamation of unpalatable truths, not only an attempt to declare the whole counsel of God, not only those qualities which Schleiermacher considered essential to good preaching, “a perfect moral humility with energetic independence of thought, a profound sense of sin with respect for criticism and a passion for truth,” but also the habitudes and excellencies of a good craftsman. For to speak God’s word faithfully a man must spare no pains to make it effective; he must study to become as good



a mouthpiece and as tuneful an organ for the Divine Spirit to use as may be possible to his natural gifts and improved opportunities.

I shall therefore crave your attention for a few minutes to some of those more technical points of the Preaching Art which have been entirely passed by in our previous discussions. I shall say a little to you about five matters which may claim your consideration: (1) The Voice, (2) Rhetoric, (3) Composition, (4) Illustration, (5) Variety of topics.

Each one of these points requires care, though, I am inclined to think, they have generally received an undue attention, so that students for the ministry have lost sight of the far more important question which underlies them all.

*First*, about the Voice. There are far too few preachers against whom the words addressed to Ezekiel could be urged, "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument."<sup>1</sup> Yet so charming is a voice

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

of sweet tone and wide compass that some preachers have held a congregation for years with that qualification alone. *Vox et præterea nihil*, the sweet sound has soothed the hearers, and if it has taught them nothing of heavenly lore, it has at least produced a dreamy impression of celestial melodies. On the other hand, it is well known that some of the greatest preachers have had a thin and cracked, or a harsh and thunderous voice, which has made it difficult for them to secure the attention of their congregations until they had succeeded in proving that the imperfect instrument had a noble music at the centre. But so far as the voice can be produced by careful cultivation, and modulated by study and practice, the preacher should see to it that, like a good workman, he shall never mar his message by a flaw in the instrument, but shall give to all the truths he has to communicate the added charm of a musical and appropriate delivery. If he has never learnt to sing he should secure the same training in the use of the diaphragm, and in the flexible movements of the lips, which

singers find necessary; if he does not get a proper course of teaching in elocution, he should at least practise distinctness of enunciation, and try to be rid of any mannerisms or solecisms of speech which would leave an unpleasant impression on cultivated ears. A candid friend who will not shrink from pointing out these defects, or these menaces of habit, may be among the most useful preceptors of a young preacher. I have heard it said that to secure such a friend it is worth while for a minister to get married. But the suggestion is far-fetched, for most men only woo women who admire their faults, and to marry a wife who will note and correct an ugly mode of speech or an affected way of delivery would require a courage which is seldom found on this side of forty.

But above all things a man who means to speak to men should avoid that monotonous sing-song or that canonical whine which affects foolish young women to tears, and sounds to ecclesiastical ears like a signal of sanctity. In England the widespread indifference to public

worship, and the masculine revolt against the Church, are largely due to the clerical affectations which have crept in with the other mediævalisms of Anglo-Catholicism. It is a strange thing if the man of God is to be something less than a man.

*Second*, a word about Rhetoric. Rhetoric in preaching is like the trumpet and the band in an army; it is a good accompaniment of the sword-play, but a bad substitute for it. If the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," should be absent, all the fanfaronade may be disregarded, there will be no execution. The roll of drums and the cadence of brass instruments stir warlike impulses, but do not rout the enemy. This drum and trumpet rhetoric is found wanting. God gives a command to His servant:

Wherever Truth her holy warfare wages,  
Or Freedom pines, there let thy voice be heard;  
Sound like a prophet-warning down the ages,  
The human utterance of God's living word.

He will not be content, nor will the men who

hear, if there is simply a fine display of eloquence, splendid images, anecdotes which stir to laughter, and appeals which move to tears. The stern impatience of the modern mind towards the pulpit points to a growing conviction that we have had enough of trumpet and band, and it is time now for the sword-play, the onset, and the victorious grapple.

Yet if the message is real, and the sword of the Spirit is at work, a man may do his best with rhetoric. He may master it; it must not master him. As poetry lasts and works when prose is dead, just because it is the fittest form of speech, the best word always in the best place, so rhetoric, which is the poetry of the spoken word, gains an entrance and effects a lodgment where more pedestrian language fails. A preacher will do well to study the secret of great orators, in the senate, in the pulpit, or on the platform. Part of the secret is communicable. It is largely a question of taking pains; it is partly a matter of practice. And whatever approved human methods there may be of fixing attention and of communicat-

ing truth, let them all be employed in this supreme task of speech, the delivery of the Word of God. The study of good models is usually more effective than the study of rules. The English Bible is the best model of all, but Shakespeare and Milton come second; and a man who habitually thinks in the language of these three will acquire a range of expression, a command of phrase, a psychological penetration of utterance, which, with proper attention to the delivery and the voice, will secure all the advantages of rhetoric.

I am aware of a tendency to colloquialise the language of the pulpit, and to assimilate it to the style of a leading article in a daily newspaper. We are invited to address the people in the vernacular of the people. Our sermons are to be paragraphs, pointed, pithy, personal. We are to introduce the tall talk, the rant, the cheap quotations, which pass for eloquence in other quarters. We are to be demagogues in order to lead the Demos. I hope this tendency will be resisted, for it rests on a delusion. Though *populus* and *vulgus* sound like syno-

nyms, popularity and vulgarity are by no means identical. A demagogue does not lead the Demos; he is led by them. The vernacular of the people is not the debased language of the street any more than worn and fretted coins are the coinage of the realm. But the true vernacular in which men are to be approached, especially on high and momentous themes, is that pure well of English undefiled which even common minds, when they hear it, recognise as their real mother tongue, and welcome with gratitude as an ennobling relief from the debased lingo and the nickel slang with which they are too familiar.

*Third, Composition.* I have no inclination to give any rules for the composition of sermons. If I were tempted to give them I should end by a recommendation to, more or less systematically, break them. But one general remark may be worth insisting on. A sermon is not only relative to the preacher, and relative to the Truth which is to be delivered, but it is also relative to the audience. It is the peculiar weakness of written sermons

when they are composed for general use, and not with a view to a stated audience or a special occasion, that they generally fail to grapple the hearers in a way to secure attention. It is true, few of us would be so inept as the famous Oxford divine who was asked to preach in the gaol on the eve of an execution, and selected from his drawer one of a course of sermons which had been delivered before the University. After a very affecting and beautiful discourse he amiably concluded by saying to the condemned men—"And now, my brethren, we will remit the remainder of the subject to the next occasion, when I hope to see you all present again." But there is an awkwardness of the same quality in many excellent sermons delivered to modern audiences. A sermon needs an occasion; it must have a starting-point in the condition or the sentiment of the hearers. As Bacon wisely said, "Pre-occupation of mind ever requireth preface of speech, like a fomentation to make the unguent enter."<sup>1</sup> And yet, as the same great

<sup>1</sup> Essay xxv. : Of Dispatch.



student of men says, "To use too many circumstances ere one come to the matter is wearisome; to use none at all is blunt."<sup>1</sup>

If the congregation is prepared, the sermon may immediately plunge *in medias res*; but if not, the minds of the hearers must be first wooed, and won, grappled, interested, opened. A true pastor knows the state of the people's thought. An evangelist engaged in a mission knows that his hearers are there in the expectation of a summons to immediate decision and steadfast surrender to Christ. But the preacher who has no clue to the condition, the presuppositions, the expectations of his congregation, is not in a position to compose a sermon at all. He will do better to compose himself, to wait long and patiently on God, to receive the definite illumination of the Spirit, and then watch for the signs among the people, and speak as occasion offers. A few hours may suffice to compose a sermon for a people whom you know in the home and the school and the church — men and women whom you

<sup>1</sup> Essay xxxii. : Of Discourse.

have met at the altar of marriage, at the font, at the grave. You know where to find them; the premisses are readily granted; and you advance into your subject with a sure step. But to speak to an unknown people will require the preparation of a lifetime, a mind that is quickened with a Divine insight, a heart that is sensitive with rapid human sympathies, a tongue which is ready with winged and unpremeditated words. Perhaps the chief danger lies with the pastor who knows his flock so well that he is tempted to stint preparation, and to become slovenly in the composition of his sermons. A too uniform mode of handling the subject will induce apathy, and stifle that breath of curiosity which makes a diligent listener. A settled pastor, therefore, must be observant, and quick to notice the signs of drowsiness. If he observes that his "firstly" provokes an air of resignation, his "secondly" a gentle folding of the hands and settling in the corners, his "thirdly" a general sigh of despair, and his "lastly" the first sign of relief and interest, it is time to change his method

of composition—to begin with the “lastly,” flinging the soporific framework to the winds, and to step out from behind his sermon, speaking to his people, as it were, face to face.

If, on the other hand, he notices that his loose and extemporaneous style becomes too much like the rattling of a drum, stirs the people without impressing them, interests without convincing, moves without converting,—it may be time to bring up the more solid engine of carefully constructed discourse, piling storey upon storey in a way to draw attention upward to a crowning summit.

The most fatal thing is when a preacher sinks into a sermon-maker, like an artist who becomes a mere picture-maker; when, conceiving the sermon as the end in itself, a work of art to be produced by fixed rules and on a defined method, he devotes himself to *it*, forgetting both the people who are to be edified and the truth which is to edify them. The sermon is merely a weapon, and must be adapted to the new modes of warfare. I would as soon think of preaching like Thomas Goodwin or

John Owen as of bringing the arquebus and the halberd of the Commonwealth period into a modern field of battle. An ironclad warship is not nearly so picturesque as the full-sailed three-deckers that Nelson commanded at Trafalgar, and a sermon suited for to-day may not be half so long or stately or brilliant or poetic as the orations of Robert Hall or John Angell James, but the sole question is one of fitness: Which here and now will go home most surely, and accomplish the work most effectively? If, then, you adopt a rule of composition, see that it is a brittle one, and never hesitate to break it when a new occasion calls for a new method.

*Fourth, Illustration.* It may seem to some to be giving a disproportionate place to the subject of Illustration, when I select it from the innumerable points of the preacher's craft, and set it among the five. But it is in many cases the crucial point for one who is to teach and lead a mixed congregation, and therefore a student cannot turn his attention to it too soon. Abstract modes of thought

grow upon us too easily when we spend much time with books, and in the reverie of study. Illustrations become tiresome and impertinent to a trained thinker. The fascination of close and connected reasoning, and of convincing the understanding by logical methods, becomes almost irresistible to a growing mind. To breathe in the higher circles of thought, and to see the small matters of the field or the market-place from a serene altitude, is undoubtedly proper to a philosopher; and if a preacher studies diligently, and exercises himself in the company of great thinkers, he is apt to become a philosopher, and insensibly to drift away from common life, and lose touch with ordinary people. It would be well, no doubt, to have a philosopher preaching to philosophers, though he would have a tough task, and might end by forfeiting his philosophy. But the vast majority of mankind are not abstract thinkers—their minds almost immediately flag when they leave familiar objects. It is well not to speak even about geography unless you have a map to

show them, still less about the stars unless you have an orrery and a telescope. If, then, we would interest them in the affairs of the heavenly kingdom, we must, like the King Himself, speak in parables or allegories. Our discourse must be of tangible things and familiar persons while we suggest the invisible and the eternal. Under images of flesh and blood the truths of the Spirit must be conveyed into minds half aware. Let me quote Bacon again—the one English philosopher who has ever spoken to the average mind, precisely because of his endless ingenuity of illustration, and his unrivalled richness of colouring. “Some have in readiness,” he says, “so many tales and stories, as there is nothing they would not insinuate, but they can wrap it into a tale, which seemeth . . . to make others carry it with more pleasure.”<sup>1</sup> Every Bible-reader knows how the splendid imagery of the Apocalypse reaches simple minds that are untouched by St. Paul, and how even Paul himself, whose mind was not fertile in imagery

<sup>1</sup> Essay xxii. : Of Cunning.

or sensitive to the poetic aspect of things, constantly employed the concrete stories of the Old Testament — near and familiar to all his readers — as allegories of the lofty matters which he wished to “insinuate.” While when all is said and done the part of the New Testament which retains the most powerful hold of the world is “the truth embodied in a tale” of the Four Gospels. The narrative of that perfect life, the picture of that perfect Being, the exquisite colour and movement of the stories in which He taught the people, and the allegorical significance of even His miracles, speak to all generations with a new voice, and constantly suggest how we, even to-day, ought to preach the Word of God. It was the apprehension of this truth that led the builders of St. Mark’s at Venice to cover the walls within and without with the gospel in mosaic. It was this that led one of the world’s noblest religious teachers, Edmund Spenser, to throw his discourse of virtue and vice, the *Faerie Queene*, into the form of an Allegory; for, as he says, “Xenophon is preferred before

Plato, for that the one in the exquisite depth of his judgment formed a Commonwealth such as it should be; but the other, in the person of Cyrus and the Persians, fashioned a government such as might best be; so much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample than by rule." Let the preacher do his thinking in the abstract, as Michael Angelo studied the human frame in a skeleton, but let him clothe it for the people in the concrete, and see that all his language is that of one who, though he spends long hours in heavenly places, yet lives and moves among men. And lest this counsel should be abused, let me observe that, while to string together anecdotes in which "thrill is everything and relevancy nothing," is the easiest and most shambling mode of popular and idle speech; to get and to use real illustrations—illustrations, that is, which actually illustrate, and are not only brought in to show their own brilliance—is a very laborious task, demanding very careful study and close observation, a methodical collection of incidents and facts,



and a long meditation on the eternal relation between Nature, which Goethe called the garment of God, and God who is the Interpreter, as He is the Creator, of Nature. No idle man can use illustrations or tell anecdotes properly—and yet they are the constant resource of the idle. It is one thing to deck a Christmas-tree with dolls, trinkets, oranges, and candles; it is quite another thing to produce a real tree with the delicate burgeons, the unfolding blossoms, and the luminous fruits of its kind. The one is fantastic, the other creative. And the use of illustrations must be creative, and not fantastic.

*Fifth, Variety.* Those of you who were privileged to hear, and even those who, like myself, have only had the advantage of reading, Dr. Stalker's Yale Lectures in 1891, will hardly need to be reminded of the manifoldness of a faithful Christian ministry. And even those of you who can accept the view taken in the present lectures, and are prepared to receive the Word in its fulness and expansiveness direct from God Himself to deliver to

your fellow-men, will probably not err on the side of artificial restrictions upon the subjects of preaching. It is only he who is bound by the mechanical conception of the Word of God as a book, the last page of which was written many hundreds of years ago, and is therefore deterred from receiving the fresh and vital inspirations of the Living Word, or Logos, that falls into a contracted choice of topics and gradually fails — unless he be a man of great natural gifts, eloquence, wit, and vigour — to hold the attention and touch the imagination of an active age like this.

But there is still a remark to be made on the point of variety which, though obvious enough, has not always struck the preacher until it is too late to be of much avail. In every modern congregation, especially among the more advanced and progressive communities which form the great cities of America and England, there will be found a remarkable gamut of intellectual states, of emotional susceptibilities, of temperamental affinities. A man of God who is bent on giving God's message to this diversi-

fied audience will do well to picture to himself the whole scale over which his appeals must range, and to be very careful not to remain too long on any point of the scale, or to leave any other point in the scale too long untouched.

We do not live in a time when any presuppositions are universally granted. Among the Jews of the First Century, the Law with its Theism and its strong ethical axioms was taken for granted. In our day we cannot assume that all our hearers are even Theists; we cannot even be sure that they all admit the existence of conscience and moral responsibility. It is necessary, therefore, from time to time to lay, in full view of modern science and the current philosophical notions, the old foundations of faith in God and the claim of the moral law. The Bible is written by Theists for Theists; the preacher now often has to address Atheists. The Bible assumes that men possess a moral sense; modern materialism and the gross sensuality of drunken and debauched cities have discredited even this

primary assumption. The preacher of the Twentieth Century will be compelled to make broad the basis of his teaching in the demonstrable truths of Natural Religion.

Or again, in the mediæval Church the authority of the Church could be assumed. By threats of inconceivable severity the minds of men were terrified, and the mighty premiss of the Church's infallibility was established by the same arts that had formerly secured the autocracy of the Cæsars. No wise preacher to-day, even in the Roman Church, will start from that shattered premiss; and every true son of the Reformation will rejoice that a firmer axiom is possible, and a more impregnable position is to be sought.

Or again, in the Seventeenth Century every preacher might assume that his hearers granted the infallibility of the Scriptures, and his arguments could proceed on a simple basis of "It is written." There are still many individuals in all congregations who readily grant this assumption, but woe to the preacher who forgets the increasing number of those who do

not! Nothing can surpass the futility and, in the end, the mischief of the dogmatic appeal, made with dull vehemence and harsh unreason, on the ground of Biblical authority, to those who are really waiting for evidence that the Bible is authentic or true, consistent or convincing, inspired or authoritative.

And if the diversity of intellectual conditions must constantly be remembered, it is equally necessary to consider the wide difference of temperaments, and to preach with some adaptation to these differences. Some are moved only by reason, and become stolid and resentful directly an emotional key is struck. Some are moved only by emotion, and grow apathetic and fidgety whenever the discourse moves on the lines of pure thought. Each of these classes must be sought and won. Still more striking is the divergence between the ethical or practical mind on the one hand, and the mystical or spiritual on the other. The first will be reached by the Sermon on the Mount, and in some plain discourse about keeping the passions under control, or the like,

will be led to the secret of God; the other, unmoved by the strong appeal of duty, will see nothing in Christ until He is being tortured and crucified, and will only be stirred to repentance, amendment, and a new life by some clear and sharp doctrine in the metaphysics of Redemption. It is a one-sided and ineffectual ministry which overlooks these endless varieties, and the man who would make full proof of his ministry, and speak faithfully the Word of God, must suffer his mind and heart to expand until he can, to some extent, at any rate, realise the numberless states and conditions and requirements which are represented in even a very ordinary congregation of modern worshippers.

But I may not dwell any longer on these secondary considerations, and, indeed, it is now time for me to draw my exhortations to a close, and to take leave of you, my young brothers in the service of Christ. Whether the view of the Christian ministry which I have presented commands your assent and claims your adhesion or not; whether the mes-

sage which I crossed the Atlantic to deliver finds a lodgment in American hearts; whether I shall ever be permitted to see you again and to learn of your progress and success in your sacred calling, or now, for once only, I have met you, not to renew our communion until we come together, with all the sons of God from the beginning, to render account of our stewardship;—I may be permitted in a few parting words to leave upon your minds my own impression of the greatness and the glory of this call to be the prophets and the messengers of God.

There are, I suppose, with you, as with us, some who thrust themselves into a priest's office for a morsel of bread. In my Oxford days I came into contact with not a few, who entered the sacred office of the ministry for the most shameless reasons—a family living was in their possession, a failure in the schools showed them that they could not expect promotion in the learned professions, sometimes even the mere insistence of parents, the promptings of vanity, or the weakness for ecclesiasti-

cal millinery and ancient liturgies, inclined them to adopt the clerical life as a profession. Christianity in England labours under the incubus of large numbers of ministers who from these irrelevant motives have become the apparent representatives of Christ, and the utterers of the Word of God to the people. If the view that I have urged is correct, not only have these false prophets heaped up for themselves a stern reward, but the Church which delights to have it so is forfeiting all claim to represent the living Word to the living generation. The apparent reconciliation of God and Mammon is the most ominous feature of the present situation; and one's heart quails to see how "in the Prophet's soul the dreams of avarice stay" —

No sun or star so bright  
In all the world of light  
That they should draw to Heaven his downward eye;  
He hears the Almighty's word,  
He sees the angel's sword,  
Yet low upon the earth his heart and treasure lie.

Just as the hope of ancient Israel lay in those



great prophets of the Seventh and Sixth Centuries, who came, burdened with the word of the Lord, to denounce a corrupt State and a priestly Church, and sacrificed fame and honour, comfort and life, in order to assert the abiding authority of a present Spiritual Revelation; so the hope of Christendom at the present time practically lies in the emergence of real prophets, who, viewing with clear eyes the abominations of so-called Christian society, and judging with the detachment of inspiration the gross corruptions of Churches that dwell in tradition, and not in the spirit, and seek their own things instead of the things of God, can utter a voice clear and convincing which all men shall recognise as the Word of God.

And I ask myself if the prophets are to return into our midst where rather should we look for their appearing than in this New World, which was first settled by men of the prophetic temper fleeing from the Jezebel of the Seventeenth Century, and has grown up, not altogether unconscious of the Spirit of the Highest? Possibly God will call His prophets

not from Jerusalem or Samaria, but from Tekoa and Anathoth. It is not for us to assume that because He has called us to His ministry He will withhold His communications from others, untrained and unlearned, who have not been summoned to this vocation. But speaking as a man, with all the limitations of human insight and judgment, I cannot but inquire, if the prophets are to come to the world again, why not from this Western Hemisphere of buoyant hope and quickening impulse, and if from America, why not from this old and consecrated college?

Suffer me to say to you, as young Americans, your danger seems to lie in the engrossing power of material progress, and that ferment of growing lucre which forbids the entrance of the Spirit of God. Is not that mighty Spirit moving you to set your face like a flint against this benumbing influence, to cry aloud and spare not, in resisting "the narrowing lust of gold"? Are you not resolved that this mighty State, this complex people, the latest birth of time, the brightest hope of the future, shall not

fail of its calling, and fall from its inheritance, to become —

A Race

Shrivelling in sunshine of its prosperous years,

but shall accomplish the purpose which was planted by the trembling hands of God's fugitives in American soil, when the men of the *Mayflower* landed on Plymouth Rock?

Suffer me to say to you, as young ministers — and prophets — come out into those wide spaces where the whisper of God is heard in the air, and climb those mountain heights where He passes by in the awful joy of revelation; come out, touch not the unclean thing; do not entangle yourselves in the things of the world. It is yours to see God face to face and live; it is yours to feel the mighty voice thrilling through your heart, subduing your mind, and stirring your will to the omnipotence of self-emptying obedience. The message of God is abroad — the oracles are open — it is for you to enter in, to receive, and to communicate. Ambition must be dead; avarice must be dead; self altogether must be dead. And you,

the Cross in your soul, the love of God shed abroad in your heart, are to be like one "set down

In some strange jeopardy on enormous hills,  
Or swimming at night alone upon the sea, —  
Whose lesser life falls from him, and the dream  
Is broken which had held him unaware,  
And with a shudder he feels his naked soul  
In the great black world face to face with God."

THE END.

JUST READY.

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